SLIPPY McGEE

MARIE CONWAY OEMLER

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SOMETIMES KNOWN AS THE BUTTERFLY MAN

BY

MARIE CONWAY OEMLER

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TO

ELIZABETH AND ALAN OEMLER

FOREWORD

I have known life and love, I have known death and disaster;
Foregathered with fools, succumbed to sin, been not unacquainted with shame;
Doubted, and yet held fast to a faith no doubt could o'ermaster.
Won and lost: — and I know it was all a part of the Game.

Youth and the dreams of youth, hope, and the triumph of sorrow:
I took as they came, I played them all; and I trumped the trick when I could.
And now, O Mover of Men, let the end be to-day or to-morrow —
I have staked and played for Myself, and You and the Game were good!

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	APPLEBORO	3
II	THE COMING OF SLIPPY McGEE	19
III	NEIGHBORS	37
IV	UNDERWINGS	48
V	ENTER KERRY	65
VI	"THY SERVANT WILL GO AND FIGHT WITH THIS PHILISTINE." 1 SAM. 17–32	94
VII	THE GOING OF SLIPPY McGEE	111
VIII	THE BUTTERFLY MAN	131
IX	NESTS	145
X	THE BLUEJAY	172
XI	A LITTLE GIRL GROWN UP	189
XII	JOHN FLINT, GENTLEMAN	203
XIII	"EACH IN HIS OWN COIN"	226
XIV	THE WISHING CURL	258
XV	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT	283
XVI	"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR"	302
XVII	"—SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY—"	319
XVIII	ST. STANISLAUS CROOKS HIS ELBOW	343
XIX	THE I O U OF SLIPPY McGEE	364
XX	BETWEEN A BUTTERFLY'S WINGS	382

SLIPPY McGEE

CHARACTERS

FATHER ARMAND JEAN DE RANCÉ, *Catholic Priest of Appleboro, South Carolina*

MADAME DE RANCÉ, *his Mother*

CLÉLIE, *their Servant*

LAURENCE MAYNE, *the Boy*

MARY VIRGINIA EUSTIS, *the Girl*

JAMES EUSTIS, *Man of the New South*

MRS. EUSTIS, *a Lady*

DOCTOR WALTER WESTMORELAND, *the Beloved Physician*

JIM DABNEY, *Editor of the Appleboro "Clarion"*

MAJOR APPLEBY CARTWRIGHT
MISS SALLY RUTH DEXTER
JUDGE HAMMOND MAYNE
} *Neighbors*

GEORGE INGLESBY, *the Boss of Appleboro*

J. HOWARD HUNTER, *his Private Secretary*

KERRY, *an Irish Setter*

PITACHE, *the Parish House Dog*

THE MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES OF SOUTH CAROLINA

THE CHILDREN, THE MILL-HANDS, THE FACTORY FOLKS, and SLIPPY MCGEE, *sometimes known as the Butterfly Man*

SLIPPY McGEE

CHAPTER I

APPLEBORO

"NOW there was my cousin Eliza," Miss Sally Ruth Dexter once said to me, "who was forced to make her home for thirty years in Vienna! She married an attaché of the Austrian legation, you know; met him while she was visiting in Washington, and she was such a pretty girl and he was such a charming man that they fell in love with each other and got married. Afterward his family procured him a very influential post at court, and of course poor Cousin Eliza had to stay there with him. Dear mama often said she considered it a most touching proof of woman's willingness to sacrifice herself—for there 's no doubt it must have been very hard on poor Cousin Eliza. She was born and raised right here in Appleboro, you see."

Do not think that Miss Sally Ruth was anything but most transparently sincere in thus sympathizing with the sad fate of poor Cousin Eliza, who was born and raised in Appleboro, South Carolina, and yet sacrificed herself by dragging out thirty years of exile in the court circles of Vienna! Any trueborn Appleboron would be equally sorry for Cousin Eliza for the same reason that

Miss Sally Ruth was. Get yourself born in South Carolina and you will comprehend.

"What did you see in your travels that you liked most?" I was curious to discover from an estimable citizen who had spent a summer abroad.

"Why, General Lee's standin' statue in the Capitol an' his recumbent figure in Washington an' Lee chapel, of co'se!" said the colonel promptly. "An' listen hyuh, Father De Rancé, I certainly needed him to take the bad taste out of my mouth an' the red out of my eye after viewin' Bill Sherman on a brass hawse in New York, with an angel that 'd lost the grace of God prancin' on ahead of him!" He added reflectively: "I had my own ideah as to where any angel leadin' *him* was most likely headed for!"

"Oh, I meant in Europe!" hastily.

"Well, father, I saw pretty near everything in Europe, I reckon; likewise New York. But comin' home I ran up to Washington an' Lee to visit the general lyin' there asleep, an' it just needed one glance to assure me that the greatest an' grandest work of art in this round world was right there before me! What do folks want to rush off to foreign parts for, where they can't talk plain English an' a man can't get a satisfyin' meal of home cookin', when we 've got the greatest work of art an' the best hams ever cured, right in Virginia? See America first, I say. Why, suh, I was so glad to get back to good old Appleboro that I let everybody else wait until I 'd gone around to the monument an' looked up at our man standin' there on top of it, an' I found myself sayin' over the names he 's guardin' as if I was sayin' my prayers: *our names.*

"Uh huh, Europe 's good enough for Europeans an' the Nawth 's a God's plenty good enough for Yankees, but Appleboro for me. Why, father, they have n't got anything like our monument to their names!"

They have n't. And I should hate to think that any Confederate living or dead ever even remotely resembled the gray granite one on our monument. He is a brigandish and bearded person in a foraging cap, leaning forward to rest himself on his gun. His long skirted coat is buckled tightly about his waist to form a neat bustle effect in the back, and the solidity of his granite shoes and the fell rigidity of his granite breeches are such as make the esthetic shudder; one has to admit that as a work of art he is almost as bad as the statues cluttering New York City. But in Appleboro folks are not critical; they see him not with the eyes of art but with the deeper vision of the heart. He stands for something that is gone on the wind and the names he guards are our names.

This is not irrelevant. It is merely to explain something that is inherent in the living spirit of all South Carolina; wherefore it explains my Appleboro, the real inside-Appleboro.

Outwardly Appleboro is just one of those quiet, conservative, old Carolina towns where, loyal to the customs and traditions of their fathers, they would as lief whitewash what they firmly believe to be the true and natural character of General William Tecumseh Sherman as they would their own front fences. Occasionally somebody will give a backyard henhouse a needed coat or two; but a front fence? Never! It is n't the thing. Nobody does it. All normal South Carolinians come into the world with a native horror of paint and whitewash and

they depart hence even as they were born. In consequence, towns like Appleboro take on the venerable aspect of antiquity, peacefully drowsing among immemorial oaks draped with long, gray, melancholy moss.

Not that we are cut off from the world, or that we have escaped the clutch of commerce. We have the usual shops and stores, even an emporium or two, and street lights until twelve, and the mills and factory. We have the river trade, and two railroads tap our rich territory to fetch and carry what we take and give. And, except in the poor parish of which I, Armand De Rancé, am pastor, and some few wealthy families like the Eustises, Agur's wise and noble prayer has been in part granted to us; for if it has not been possible to remove far from us all vanity and lies, yet we have been given neither poverty nor riches, and we are fed with food convenient for us.

In Appleboro the pleasant and prejudiced Old looks askance at the noisy and intruding New, before which it is forced to retreat—always without undue or undignified haste, however, and always unpainted and unreconstructed. It is a town where families live in houses that have sheltered generations of the same name, using furniture that was not new when Marion's men hid in the swamps and the redcoats overran the country-side. Almost everybody has a garden, full of old-fashioned shrubs and flowers, and fine trees. In such a place men and women grow old serenely and delightfully, and youth flourishes all the fairer for the rich soil which has brought it forth.

One has twenty-four hours to the day in a South Carolina town—plenty of time to live in, so that one

can afford to do things unhurriedly and has leisure to be neighborly. For you do have neighbors here. It is true that they know all your business and who and what your grandfather was and was n't, and they are prone to discuss it with a frankness to make the scalp prickle. But then, you know theirs, too, and you are at liberty to employ the same fearsome frankness, provided you do it politely and are not speaking to an outsider. It is perfectly permissible for *you* to say exactly what you please about your own people to your own people, but should an outsider and an alien presume to do likewise, the Carolina code admits of but one course of conduct; borrowing the tactics of the goats against the wolf, they close in shoulder to shoulder and present to the audacious intruder an unbroken and formidable front of horns.

And it is the last place left in all America where decent poverty is in nowise penalized. You can be poor pleasantly—a much rarer and far finer art than being old gracefully. Because of this, life in South Carolina sometimes retains a simplicity as fine and sincere as it is charming.

I deplore the necessity, but I will be pardoned if I pause here to become somewhat personal, to explain who and what I am and how I came to be a pastor in Appleboro. To explain myself, then, I shall have to go back to a spring morning long ago, when I was not a poor parish priest, no, nor ever dreamed of becoming one, but was young Armand De Rancé, a flower-crowned and singing pagan, holding up to the morning sun the chalice of spring; joyous because I was of a perishable beauty, dazzled because life gave me so much, proud of

an old and honored name, secure in ancestral wealth, loving laughter so much that I looked with the raised eyebrow and the twisted lip at austerities and prayers.

If ever I reflected at all, it was to consider that I had nothing to pray for, save that things might ever remain as they were: that I should remain me, myself, young Armand De Rancé, loving and above all beloved of that one sweet girl whom I loved with all my heart. Young, wealthy, strong, beautiful, loving, and beloved! To hold all that, crowded into the hollow of one boyish hand! Oh, it was too much!

I do not think I had ever felt my own happiness so exquisitely as I did upon that day which was to see the last of it. I was to go a-Maying with her who had ever been as my own soul, since we were children playing together. So I rode off to her home, an old house set in its walled inclosure by the river. At the door somebody met me, calling me by my name. I thought at first it had been a stranger. It was her mother. And while I stood staring at her changed face she took me by the hand and began to whisper in my ear . . . what I had to know. Blindly, like one bludgeoned on the head, I followed her into a darkened room, and saw what lay there with closed eyes and hair still wet from the river into which my girl had cast herself.

No, I cannot put into words just what had happened; indeed, I never really knew all. There was no public scandal, only great sorrow. But I died that morning. The young and happy part of me died, and, only half-alive I walked about among the living, dragging about with me the corpse of what had been myself. Crushed by this horrible burden which none saw but I, I was

blind to the beauties of earth and deaf to the mercies of heaven, until a great Voice called me to come out of the sepulcher of myself; and I came—alive again, and free, of a strong spirit, but with youth gone from it. Out of the void of an irremediable disaster God had called me to His service, chastened and humbled.

"Who is weak and I am not weak? who is offended and I burn not?"

And yet, although I knew my decision was irrevocable, I did not find it easy to tell my mother. Then:

"Little mother of my heart," I blurted, "my career is decided. I have been called. I am for the Church."

We were in her pleasant morning room, a beautiful room, and the lace curtains were pushed aside to allow free ingress of air and sunlight. Between the windows hung two objects my mother most greatly cherished—one an enameled Petitot miniature, gold-framed, of a man in the flower of his youth. His hair, beautiful as the hair of Absalom, falls about his haughty, high-bred face, and so magnificently is he clothed that when I was a child I used to associate him in my mind with those *"captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, all of them desirable young men, . . . girdled with a girdle upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to" . . . whom Aholibah "doted upon when her eyes saw them portrayed upon the walls in vermilion."*

The other is an Audran engraving of that same man grown old and stripped of beauty and of glory, as the leaf that falls and the flower that fades. The somber habit of an order has replaced scarlet and gold; and sackcloth, satin. Between the two pictures hangs an old

crucifix. For that is Armand De Rancé, glorious sinner, handsomest, wealthiest, most gifted man of his day —and his a day of glorious men; and this is Armand De Rancé, become the sad austere reformer of La Trappe.

My mother rose, walked over to the Abbé's pictures, and looked long and with rather frightened eyes at him. Perhaps there was something in the similarity to his of the fate which had come upon me who bore his name, which caused her to turn so pale. I also am an Armand De Rancé, of a cadet branch of that great house, which emigrated to the New World when we French were founding colonies on the banks of the Mississippi.

Her hand went to her heart. Turning, she regarded me pitifully.

"Oh, no, not that!" I reassured her. "I am at once too strong and not strong enough for solitude and silence. Surely there is room and work for one who would serve God through serving his fellow men, in the open, is there not?"

At that she kissed me. Not a whimper, although I am an only son and the name dies with me, the old name of which she was so beautifully proud! She had hoped to see my son wear my father's name and face and thus bring back the lost husband she had so greatly loved; she had prayed to see my children about her knees, and it must have cost her a frightful anguish to renounce these sweet and consoling dreams, these tender and human ambitions. Yet she did so, smiling, and kissed me on the brow.

Three months later I entered the Church; and be-

cause I was the last De Rancé, and twenty four, and the day was to have been my wedding-day, there fell upon me, sorely against my will, the halo of sad romance.

Endeared thus to the young, I suppose I grew into what I might call a very popular preacher. Though I myself cannot see that I ever did much actual good, since my friends praised my sermons for their "fine Gallic flavor," and I made no enemies.

But there was no rest for my spirit, until the Call came again, the Call that may not be slighted, and bade me leave my sheltered place, my pleasant lines, and go among the poor, to save my own soul alive.

That is why and how the Bishop, my old and dear friend, after long argument and many protests, at length yielded and had me transferred from fashionable St. Jean Baptiste's to the poverty-stricken missionary parish of sodden laboring folk in a South Carolina coast-town: he meant to cure me, the good man! I should have the worst at the outset.

"And I hope you understand," said he, sorrowfully, "that this step practically closes your career. Such a pity, for you could have gone so far! You might even have worn the red hat. It is not hoping too much that the last De Rancé, the namesake of the great Abbé, might have finished as an American cardinal! But God's will be done. If you must go, you must go."

I said, respectfully, that I had to go.

"Well, then, go and try it out to the uttermost," said the Bishop. "And it may be that, if you do not kill yourself with overwork, you may return to me cured,

when you see the futility of the task you wish to undertake." But I was never again to see his kind face in this world.

And then, as if to cut me off yet more completely from all ties, as if to render my decision irrevocable, it was permitted of Providence that the wheel of my fortune should take one last revolution. Henri Dupuis of the banking house which bore his name shot himself through the head one fine morning, and as he had been my guardian and was still the executor of my father's estate, the whole De Rancé fortune went down with him. All of it. Even the old house went, the old house which had sheltered so many of the name these two hundred years. If I could have grieved for anything it would have been that. Nothing was left except the modest private fortune long since secured to my mother by my father's affection. It had been a bridal gift, intended to cover her personal expenses, her charities, and her pretty whims. Now it was to stand between her and want.

Stripped all but bare, and with one servant left of all our staff, we turned our backs upon our old life, our old home, and faced the world anew, in a strange place where nothing was familiar, and where I who had begun so differently was destined to grow into what I have since become—just an old priest, with but small reputation outside of his few friends and poor working-folks. There! That is quite enough of *me!*

There was one pleasant feature of our new home that rejoiced me for my mother's sake. From the very first she found neighbors who were friendly and charming. Now my mother, when we came to Apple-

boro, was still a beautiful woman, fair and rosy, with a profusion of *blonde cendre* curls just beginning to whiten, a sweet and arch face, and eyes of clearest hazel, valanced with jet. She had been perhaps the loveliest and most beloved woman of that proud and select circle which is composed of families descended from the old noblesse, the most exclusive circle of New Orleans society. And, as she said, nothing could change nor alter the fact that no matter *what* happened to us, we were still De Rancés!

"Ah! And was it, then, a De Rancé who had the holy Mother of God painted in a family picture, with a scroll issuing from her lips addressing him as 'My Cousin'?" I asked, slyly.

"If it was, nobody in the world had a better right!" said she stoutly.

Thus the serene and unquestioning faith of their estimate of themselves in the scheme of things, as evidenced by these Carolina folk around her, caused Madame De Rancé neither surprise nor amusement. She understood. She shared many of their prejudices, and she of all women could appreciate a pride that was almost equal to her own. When they initiated her into the inevitable and inescapable Carolina game of Matching Grandfathers, she always had a Roland for their Oliver; and as they generally came back with an Oliver to match her Roland, all the players retired with equal honors and mutual respect. Every door in Appleboro at once opened wide to Madame De Rancé. The difference in religion was obviated by the similarity of Family.

Fortunately, too, the Church and Parish House were not in the mill district itself, a place shoved aside, full

of sordid hideousness, ribboned with railroad tracks, squalid with boarding-houses never free from the smell of bad cooking, sinister with pawnshops, miserable with depressingly ugly rows of small houses where the hands herded, and all of it darkened by the grim shadow of the great red brick mills themselves. Instead, our Church sits on a tree-shaded corner in the old town, and the roomy white-piazza'd Parish House is next door, embowered in the pleasantest of all gardens.

That garden reconciled my mother to her exile, for I am afraid she had regarded Appleboro with somewhat of the attitude of the castaway sailor toward a desert island—a refuge after shipwreck, but a desert island nevertheless, a place which cuts off one from one's world. And when at first the poor, uncouth, sullen creatures who were a part of my new charge, frightened and dismayed her, there was always the garden to fly to for consolation. If she could n't plant seeds of order and cleanliness and morality and thrift in the sterile soil of poor folks' minds, she could always plant seeds of color and beauty and fragrance in her garden and be surer of the result. That garden was my delight, too. I am sure no other equal space ever harbored so many birds and bees and butterflies; and its scented dusks was the paradise of moths. Great wonderful fellows clothed in kings' raiment, little chaps colored like flowers and seashells and rainbows, there the airy cohorts of the People of the Sky wheeled and danced and fluttered. Now my grandfather and my father had been the friends of Audubon and of Agassiz, and I myself had been the correspondent of Riley and Scudder and Henry Edwards, for I love the People of the Sky

more than all created things. And when I watched them in my garden, I am sure it was they who lent my heart their wings to lift it above the misery and overwork and grief which surrounded me; I am sure I should have sunk at times, if God had not sent me my little friends, the moths and butterflies.

Our grounds join Miss Sally Ruth Dexter's on one side and Judge Hammond Mayne's are just behind us; so that the Judge's black Daddy January can court our yellow Clélie over one fence, with coy and delicate love-gifts of sugar-cane and sweet-potato pone in season; and Miss Sally Ruth's roosters and ours can wholeheartedly pick each other's eyes out through the other all the year round. These are fowls with so firm a faith in the Mosaic code of an eye for an eye that when Miss Sally Ruth has six blind of the right eye we have five blind of the left. We are at times stung by the Mayne bees, but freely and bountifully supplied with the Mayne honey, a product of fine flavor. And our little dog Pitache made it the serious business of his life to keep the Mayne cats in what he considered their proper bounds.

Major Appleby Cartwright, our neighbor to the other side of Miss Sally Ruth, has a theory that not alone by our fruits, but by our animals, shall we be known for what we are. He insists that Pitache wags his tail and barks in French and considers all cats Protestants, and that Miss Sally Ruth's hens are all Presbyterians at heart, in spite of the fact that her roosters are Mormons. The Major likewise insists that you could n't possibly hope to know the real Judge Hammond Mayne unless you knew his pet cats. You admire that calm

and imperturbable dignity, that sphinxlike and yet vigilant poise of bearing which has made Judge Mayne so notable an ornament of the bench? It is purely feline: "He caught it from his cats, suh: he caught every God-blessed bit of it from his cats!"

As one may perceive, we have delicious neighbors!

When we had been settled in Appleboro a little more than a year, and I had gotten the parish wheels running fairly smooth, we discovered that by my mother's French house-keeping, that exquisitely careful housekeeping which uses everything and wastes nothing, my salary was going to be quite sufficient to cover our modest ménage, thus leaving my mother's own income practically intact. We could use it in the parish; but there was so much to be done for that parish that we were rather at a loss where to begin, or what one thing to accomplish among so many things crying aloud. But finally, tackling what seemed to us the worst of these crying evils, we were able to turn the two empty rooms upstairs into what Madame pleasantly called Guest Rooms, thus remedying, to the best of our ability, the absolute lack of any accommodation for the sick and injured poor. And as time passed, these Guest Rooms, so greatly needed, proved not how much but how little we could do. We could only afford to maintain two beds on our small allowance, for they had to be absolutely free, to help those for whom they were intended—poor folks in immediate and dire need, for whom the town had no other place except an insanitary room in the jail. You could be born and baptized in the Guest Rooms, or shriven and sent thence in hope. More often you were coaxed back to health under my mother's nurs-

ing and Clélie's cooking and the skill of Doctor Walter Westmoreland.

No bill ever came to the Parish House from Dr. Walter Westmoreland, whom my poor people look upon as a direct act of Providence in their behalf. He is an enormous man, big and ruddy and baldheaded and clean-shaven, with the shoulders of a coal-heaver and legs like a pair of twin oaks. He is rather absent-minded, but he never forgets the down-and-out Guest Roomers, and he has a genius for remembering the mill-children. These are his dear and special charge.

Westmoreland is a great doctor who chooses to live in a small town; he says you can save as many lives in a little town as a big one, and folks need you more. He is a socialist who looks upon rich people as being merely poor people with money; an idealist, who will tell you bluntly that revelations have n't ceased; they 've only changed for the better.

Westmoreland has the courage of a gambler and the heart of a little child. He likes to lay a huge hand upon my shoulder and tell me to my teeth that heaven is a habit of heart and hell a condition of liver. I do not always agree with him; but along with everybody else in Appleboro, I love him. Of all the many goodnesses that God has shown me, I do not count it least that this good and kind man was sent in our need, to heal and befriend the broken and friendless waifs and strays who found for a little space a resting place in our Guest Rooms.

And when I look back I know now that not lightly nor fortuitously was I uprooted from my place and my people and sent hither to impinge upon the lives of many

who were to be dearer to me than all that had gone before; I was not idly sent to know and love Westmoreland, and Mary Virginia, and Laurence; and, above all, Slippy McGee, whom we of Appleboro call the Butterfly Man.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF SLIPPY MC GEE

ON a cold gray morning in December two members of my flock, Poles who spoke but little English and that little very badly, were on their way to their daily toil in the canning factory. It is a long walk from the Poles' quarters to the factory, and the workpeople must start early, for one is fined half an hour's time if one is five minutes late. The short-cut is down the railroad tracks that run through the mill district—for which cause we bury a yearly toll of the children of the poor.

Just beyond the freight sheds, signal tower, and water tank, is a grade crossing where so many terrible things have happened that the colored people call that place Dead Man's Crossin' and warn you not to go by there of nights because the signal tower is haunted and Things lurk in the rank growth behind the water tank, coming out to show themselves after dark. If you *must* pass it then you would better turn your coat inside out, pull down your sleeves over your hands, and be very careful to keep three fingers twisted for a Sign. This is a specific against most ha'nts, though by no means able to scare away all of them. Those at Dead Man's Crossin' are peculiarly malignant and hard to scare. Maum Jinkey Delette saw one there once, coming down the track faster than an express train, bigger than a cow,

and waving both his legs in his hands. Poor old Maum Jinkey was so scared that she chattered her new false teeth out of her mouth, and she never found those teeth to the day of her death, but had to mumble along as best she could without them.

Hurrying by Dead Man's Crossin', the workmen stumbled over a man lying beside the tracks; his clothing was torn to shreds, he was wet with the heavy night dew and covered with dirt, cinders, and partly congealed blood, for his right leg had been ground to pulp. Peering at this horrible object in the wan dusk of the early morning, they thought he was dead like most of the others found there.

For a moment the men hesitated, wondering whether it would n't be better to leave him there to be found and removed by folks with more time at their disposal. One does n't like to lose time and be consequently fined, on account of stopping to pick up a dead tramp; particularly when Christmas is drawing near and money so much needed that every penny counts.

The thing on the ground, regaining for a fraction of a second a glint of half-consciousness, quivered, moaned feebly, and lay still again. Humanity prevailing, the Poles looked about for help, but as yet the place was quite deserted. Grumbling, they wrenched a shutter off the Agent's window, lifted the mangled tramp upon it, and made straight for the Parish House; when accidents such as this happened to men such as this, were n't the victims incontinently turned over to the Parish House people? Indeed, there was n't any place else for them, unless one excepted the rough room at the jail; and the average small town jail—ours was n't any excep-

tion to the rule—is a place where a decent veterinary would scruple to put a sick cur. With him the Poles brought his sole luggage, a package tied up in oilskin, which they had found lying partly under him.

We had become accustomed to these sudden inroads of misfortune, so he was carried upstairs to the front Guest Room, fortunately just then empty. The Poles turned over to me the heavy package found with him, stolidly requested a note to the Boss explaining their necessary tardiness, and hurried away. They had done what they had to do, and they had no further interest in him. Nobody had any interest in one of the unknown tramps who got themselves killed or crippled at Dead Man's Crossin'.

The fellow was shockingly injured and we had some strenuous days and nights with him, for that which had been a leg had to come off at the knee; he had lain in the cold for some hours, he had sustained a frightful shock, and he had lost considerable blood. I am sure that in the hands of any physician less skilled and determined than Westmoreland he must have gone out. But Westmoreland, with his jaw set, followed his code and fenced with death for this apparently worthless and forfeited life, using all his skill and finesse to outwit the great Enemy; in spite of which, so attenuated was the man's chance that we were astonished when he turned the corner—very, very feebly—and we did n't have to place another pine box in the potter's field, alongside other unmarked mounds whose occupants were other unknown men, grim causes of Dead Man's Crossin's sinister name.

The effects of the merciful drugs that had kept him quiet in time wore away. Our man woke up one fore-

noon clear-headed, if hollow-eyed and mortally weak. He looked about the unfamiliar room with wan curiosity, then his eyes came to Clélie and myself, but he did not return the greetings of either. He just stared; he asked no questions. Presently, very feebly, he tried to move,—and found himself a cripple. He fell back upon his pillow, gasping. A horrible scream broke from his lips—a scream of brute rage and mortal fear, as of a trapped wild beast. He began to revile heaven and earth, the doctor, myself. Clélie, clapping her hands over her outraged ears, fled as if from fiends. Indeed, never before nor since have I heard such a frightful, inhuman power of profanity, such hideous oaths and threats. When breath failed him he lay spent and trembling, his chest rising and falling to his choking gasps.

"You had better be thankful your life is spared you, young man," I said a trifle sharply, my nerves being somewhat rasped; for I had helped Westmoreland through more than one dreadful night, and I had sat long hours by his pillow, waiting for what seemed the passing of a soul.

He glared. "Thankful?" he screamed, "Thankful, hell! I 've got to have two good legs to make any sort of a getaway, have n't I? Well, have I got 'em? I 'm down and out for fair, that 's what! Thankful? You make me sick! Honest to God, when you gas like that I feel like bashing in your brain, if you 've got any! You and your thankfulness!" He turned his quivering face and stared at the wall, winking. I wondered, heartsick, if I had ever seen a more hopelessly unprepossessing creature.

It was not so much physical, his curious ugliness; the dreadful thing was that it seemed to be his spirit which informed his flesh, an inherent unloveliness of soul upon which the body was modeled, worked out faithfully, and so made visible. Figure to yourself one with the fine shape of the welter-weight, steel-muscled, lithe, powerful, springy, slim in the hips and waist, broad in the shoulders; the arms unusually long, giving him a terrible reach, the head round, well-shaped, covered with thick reddish hair; cold, light, and intelligent eyes, full of animosity and suspicion, reminding you unpleasantly of the rattlesnake's look, wary, deadly, and ready to strike. When he thought, his forehead wrinkled. His lips shut upon each other formidably and without softness, and the jaws thrust forward with the effect as of balled fists. One ear was slightly larger than the other, having the appearance of a swelling upon the lobe. In this unlovely visage, filled with distrust and concentrated venom, only the nose retained an incongruous and unexpected niceness. It was a good straight nose, yet it had something of the pleasant tiptiltedness of a child's. It was the sort of nose which should have complemented a mouth formed for spontaneous laughter. It looked lonesome and out of place in that set and lowering countenance, to which the red straggling stubble of beard sprouting over jaws and throat lent a more sinister note.

We had had many a sad and terrible case in our Guest Rooms, but somehow this seemed the saddest, hardest and most hopeless we had yet encountered.

For three weary weeks had we struggled with him, until the doctor, sighing with physical relief, said he was

out of danger and needed only such nursing as he was sure to get.

"One does one's duty as one finds it, of course," said the big doctor, looking down at the unpromising face on the pillow, and shaking his head. "Yes, yes, yes, one must do what 's right, on the face of it, come what will. There 's no getting around *that!*" He glanced at me, a shadow in his kind gray eyes. "But there are times, my friend, when I wonder! Now, this morning I had to tell a working man his wife 's got to die. There 's no help and no hope—she 's got to die, and she a mother of young children. So I have to try desperately," said the doctor, rubbing his nose, "to cling tooth and claw to the hope that there is Something behind the scenes that knows the forward-end of things—sin and sorrow and disease and suffering and death things—and uses them always for some beneficent purpose. But in the meantime the mother dies, and here you and I have been used to save alive a poor useless devil of a one-legged tramp, probably without his consent and against his will, because it had to be and we could n't do anything else! Now, why? I can't help but wonder!"

We looked down again, the two of us, at the face on the pillow. And I wondered also, with even greater cause than the doctor; for I had opened the oilskin package the Poles found, and it had given me occasion for fear, reflection, and prayer. I was startled and alarmed beyond words, for it contained tools of a curious and unusual type,—not such tools as workmen carry abroad in the light of day.

There was no one to whom I might confide that unpleasant discovery. I simply could not terrify my

mother, nor could I in common decency burden the already overburdened doctor. Nor is our sheriff one to turn to readily; he is not a man whose intelligence or heart one may admire, respect, or depend upon. My guest had come to me with empty pockets and a burglar's kit; a hint of that, and the sheriff had camped on the Parish House front porch with a Winchester across his knees and handcuffs jingling in his pockets. No, I could n't consult the law.

I had yet a deeper and a better reason for waiting, which I find it rather hard to set down in cold words. It is this: that as I grow older I have grown more and more convinced that not fortuitously, not by chance, never without real and inner purposes, are we allowed to come vitally into each other 's lives. I have walked up the steep sides of Calvary to find out that when another wayfarer pauses for a space beside us, it is because one has something to give, the other something to receive.

So, upon reflection, I took that oilskin package weighted down with the seven deadly sins over to the church, and hid it under the statue of St. Stanislaus, whom my Poles love, and before whom they come to kneel and pray for particular favors. I tilted the saint back upon his wooden stand, and thrust that package up to where his hands fold over the sheaf of lilies he carries. St. Stanislaus is a beautiful and most holy youth. No one would ever suspect *him* of hiding under his brown habit a burglar's kit!

When I had done this, and stopped to say three Hail Marys for guidance, I went back to the little room called my study, where my books and papers and my butterfly

cabinets and collecting outfits were kept, and set myself seriously to studying my files of newspapers, beginning at a date a week preceding my man's appearance. Then:

Slippy McGee
Makes Good His Name Once More.
Slips One Over On The Police.
Noted Burglar Escapes.

said the glaring headlines in the New York papers. The dispatches were dated from Atlanta, and when I turned to the Atlanta papers I found them, too, headlining the escape of "Slippy McGee."

I learned that "the slickest crook in America" finding himself somewhat hampered in his native haunts, the seething underworld of New York, because the police suspected him of certain daring and mysterious burglaries although they had no positive proof against him, had chosen to shift his base of operations South for awhile. But the Southern authorities had been urgently warned to look out for him; in consequence they had been so close upon his heels that he had been surrounded while "on a job." Half an hour later, and he would have gotten away with his plunder; but, although they were actually upon him, by what seemed a miracle of daring and of luck he slipped through their fingers, escaped under their very noses, leaving no clue to his whereabouts. He was supposed to be still in hiding in Atlanta, though as he had no known confederates and always worked alone and unaided, the police were at a loss for information. The man had simply vanished, after his wont, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him. The papers gave rather full accounts of some of

his past exploits, from which one gathered that Slippy McGee was a very noted personage in his chosen field. I sat for a long time staring at those papers, and my thoughts were uneasy ones. What should I do?

I presently decided that I could and must question my guest. So far he had volunteered no information beyond the curt statement that his name was John Flint and he was a hobo because he liked the trade. He had been stealing a ride and he had slipped—and when he woke up we had him and he had n't his leg. And if some people knew how to be obliging they 'd make a noise like a hoop and roll away, so 's other people could pound their ear in peace, like that big stiff of a doctor ordered them to do.

As I stood by the bed and studied his sullen, suspicious, unfriendly face, I came to the conclusion that if this were not McGee himself it could very well be some one quite as dangerous.

"Friend," said I, "we do not as a rule seek information about the guests in these rooms. We do not have to; they explain themselves. I should never question your assertion that your name is Flint, and I sincerely hope it is Flint; but—there are reasons why I must and do ask you for certain definite information about yourself."

The hand lying upon the coverlet balled into a fist.

"If John Flint 's not fancy enough for you," he suggested truculently, "suppose you call me Percy? Some peach of a moniker, Percy, ain't it?"

"Percy?"

"Sure, Percy," he grinned impudently. "But if you got a grouch against Percy, can it, and make me Algy.

I don't mind. It 's not *me* beefing about monikers; it 's you."

"I am also," said I, regarding him steadily and ignoring his flippancy, "I am also obliged to ask you what is your occupation—when you are not stealing rides?"

"Looks like it might be answering questions just now, don't it? What you want to know for? Whatever it is, I 'm not able to do it now, am I? But as you 're so naturally bellyaching to know, why, I 've been in the ring."

"So I presumed. Thank you," said I, politely. "And your name is John Flint, or Percy, or Algy, just as I choose. Percy and Algy are rather unusual names for a gentleman who has been in the ring, don't you think?"

"I think," he snarled, turned suddenly ferocious, "that I 'm named what I dam' please to be named, and no squeals from skypilots about it, neither. Say! what you driving at, anyhow? If what I tell you ain't satisfying, suppose you slip over a moniker to suit yourself—and go away!"

"Oh! Suppose then," said I, without taking my eyes from his, "suppose, then, that I chose to call you—*Slippy McGee?*"

I am sure that only his bodily weakness kept him from flying at my throat. As it was, his long arms with the hands upon them outstretched like a beast's claws, shot out ferociously. His face contracted horribly, and of a sudden the sweat burst out upon it so blindingly that he had to put up an arm and wipe it away. For a moment he lay still, glaring, panting, helpless; while I stood and watched him unmoved.

"Ain't you the real little Sherlock Holmes, though?" he jeered presently. "Got Old Sleuth skinned for fair

and Nick Carter eating out of your hand! You damned skypilot!" His voice cracked. "You 're all alike! Get a man on his back and then put the screws on him!"

I made no reply; only a great compassion for this mistaken and miserable creature surged like a wave over my heart.

"For God's sake don't stand there staring like a bug-house owl!" he gritted. "Well, what you going to do? Bawl for the bulls? What put you wise?"

"Help you to get well. No. I opened your bag—and looked up the newspapers," I answered succinctly.

"Huh! A fat lot of good it 'll do me to get well now, won't it? You think I ought to thank you for butting in and keeping me from dying without knowing anything about it, don't you? Well, you got another think coming. I don't. Ever hear of a pegleg in the ring? Ever hear of a one-hoofed dip? A long time I 'd be Slippy McGee playing cat-and-mouse with the bulls, if I had to leave some of my legs home when I needed them right there on the job, would n't I? Oh, sure!"

"And was it," I wondered, "such a fine thing to be Slippy McGee, flying from the police, that one should lament his—er—disappearance?"

His eyes widened. He regarded me with pity as well as astonishment.

"Did n't you read the papers?" he wondered in his turn. "There don't many travel in *my* class, skypilot! Why, I have n't *got* any equals—the best of them trail a mile behind. Ask the bulls, if you want to know about Slippy McGee! And I let the happy dust alone. Most dips are dopes, but I was too slick; I cut it out. I knew if the dope once gets you, then the bulls get next.

Not for Slippy. I 've kept my head clear, and that 's how I 've muddled theirs. They never get next to anything until I 've cleaned up and dusted. Why, honest to God, I can open any box made, easy as easy, just like I can put it all over any bull alive! That is," a spasm twisted his face and into his voice crept the acute anguish of the artist deprived of all power to create, "that is, I could—until I made that last getaway on a freight, and this happened."

"I am sorry," said I soothingly, "that you have lost your leg, of course. But better to lose your leg than your soul, my son. Why, how do you know—"

He writhed. "Can it!" he implored. "Cut it out! Ain't I up against enough now, for God's sake? Down and out—and nothing to do but have my soul curry-combed and mashfed by a skypilot with *both* his legs and *all* his mouth on him! Ain't it hell, though? Say, you better send for the cops. I 'd rather stand for the pen than the preaching. What 'd you do with my bag, anyway?"

"But I really have no idea of preaching to you; and I would rather not send for the police—afterwards, when you are better, you may do so if you choose. You are a free agent. As for your bag, why—it is—it is—in the keeping of the Church."

"Huh!" said he, and twisted his mouth cynically. "Huh! Then it 's good-bye tools, I suppose. I 'm no churchmember, thank God, but I 've heard that once the Church gets her clamps on anything worth while all hell can't pry her loose."

Now I don't know why, but at that, suddenly and in-

explicably, as if I had glimpsed a ray of light, I felt cheered.

"Why, that 's it exactly!" said I, smiling. "Once the Church gets real hold of a thing—or a man—worth while, she holds on so fast that all hell can't pry her loose. Won't you try to remember that, my son?"

"If it 's a joke, suck the marrow out of it yourself," said he sourly. "It don't listen so horrible funny to me. And you have n't peeped yet about what you 're going to do. I 'm waiting to hear. I 'm real interested."

"Why, I really don't know yet," said I, still cheerfully. "Suppose we wait and see? Here you are, safe and harmless enough for the present. And God is good; perhaps He knows that you and I may need each other more than you and the police need each other—who can tell? I should simply set myself strictly to the task of getting entirely well, if I were you—and let it go at that."

He appeared to reflect; his forehead wrinkled painfully.

"Devil-dodger," said he, after a pause, "are you just making a noise with your face, or is that on the level?"

"That 's on the level."

His hard and suspicious eyes bored into me. And as I held his glance, a hint of wonder and amazement crept into his face.

"God A'mighty! I believe him!" he gasped. And then, as if ashamed of that real feeling, he scowled.

"Say, if you 're really on the level, I guess you 'd better not be flashing the name of Slippy McGee around

promiscuous," he suggested presently. "It won't do either you or me any good, see? And say, parson,—forget Percy and Algy. How was I to know you 'd be so white? And look here: I did know a gink named John Flint, once. Only he was called Reddy, because he 'd got such a blazing red head and whiskers. He 's croaked, so he would n't mind me using his moniker, seeing it 's not doing him any good now."

"Let us agree upon John Flint," I decided.

"Help yourself," he agreed, equably.

Clélie, with wrath and disapproval written upon every stiffened line, brought him his broth, which he took with a better grace than I had yet witnessed. He even added a muttered word of thanks.

" It 's funny," he reflected, when the yellow woman had left the room with the empty bowl, "it 's sure funny, but d 'ye know, I 'm lots easier in my mind, knowing you know, and not having to think up a hard-luck gag to hand out to you? I hate like hell to have to lie, except of course when I need a smooth spiel for the cops. I guess I 'll snooze a bit now," he added, as I rose to leave the room. And as I reached the door:

"Parson?"

"Well?"

"Why—er—come in a bit to-night, will you? That is, if you 've got time. And look here: don't you get the notion in your bean I 'm just some little old two-by-four guy of a yegg or some poor nut of a dip. I 'm *not*. Why, I 've been the whole show *and* manager besides. Yep, I 'm Slippy McGee himself."

He paused, to let this sink into my consciousness. I must confess that I was more profoundly impressed

than even he had any idea of. And then, magnanimously, he added: "You 're sure some white man, parson."

"Thank you, John Flint," said I, with due modesty.

Heaven knows why I should have been pleased and hopeful, but I was. My guest was a criminal; he had n't shown the slightest sign of compunction or of shame; instead, he had betrayed a brazen pride. And yet— I felt hopeful. Although I knew I was tacitly concealing a burglar, my conscience remained clear and unclouded, and I had a calm intuitive assurance of right. So deeply did I feel this that when I went over to the church I placed before St. Stanislaus a small lamp full of purest olive oil, which is expensive. I felt that he deserved some compensation for hiding that package under his sheaf of lilies.

The authorities of our small town knew, of course, that another forlorn wretch was being cared for at the Parish House. But had not the Parish House sheltered other such vagabonds? The sheriff saw no reason to give himself the least concern, beyond making the most casual inquiry. If I wanted the fellow, he was only too glad to let me keep him. And who, indeed, would look for a notorious criminal in a Parish House Guest Room? Who would connect that all too common occurrence, a tramp maimed by the railroad, with the mysterious disappearance of the cracksman, Slippy McGee? So, for the present, I could feel sure that the man was safe.

And in the meantime, in the orderly proceeding of everyday life, while he gained strength under my mother's wise and careful nursing and Westmoreland's wise and careful overseeing, there came to him those

who were instruments for good—my mother first, whom, like Clélie, he never called anything but "Madame" and whom, like Clélie, he presently obeyed with unquestioning and childlike readiness. Now, Madame is a truly wonderful person when she deals with people like him. Never for a moment lowering her own natural and beautiful dignity, but without a hint of condescension, Madame manages to find the just level upon which both can stand as on common ground; then, without noise, she helps, and she conveys the impression that thus noiselessly to help is the only just, natural and beautiful thing for any decent person to do, unless, perhaps, it might be to receive in the like spirit.

Judge Mayne's son, Laurence, full of a fresh and boyish enthusiasm, was such another instrument. He had a handsome, intelligent face, a straight and beautiful body, and the pleasantest voice in the world. His mother in her last years had been a fretful invalid, and to meet her constant demands the judge and his son had developed an angelic patience with weakness. They were both rather quiet and undemonstrative, this father and son; the older man, in fact had a stern visage at first glance, until one learned to know it as the face of a man trained to restraint and endurance. As for the boy, no one could long resist the shrewd, kind youngster, who could spend an hour with the most unlikely invalid and leave him all the better for it. I was unusually busy just then, Clélie frankly hated and feared the man upstairs, my mother had her hands full, and there were many heavy and lonesome hours which Laurence set himself the task of filling. I left this to the boy himself, offering no suggestions.

"Padre," said the boy to me, some time later, "that chap upstairs is the hardest nut I ever tried to crack. There 've been times when I felt tempted to crack him with a sledge-hammer, if you want the truth. You know, he always seemed to like me to read to him, but I 've never been able to discover whether or not he liked what I read. He never asked me a single question, he never seemed interested enough to make a comment. But I think that I 've made a dent in him at last."

"A dent! In Flint? With what adamantine pick, oh hardiest of miners?"

"With a book. Guess!"

"I could n't. I give up."

"The Bible!" said Laurence.

The Bible! Had *I* chosen to read it to him, he would have resented it, been impervious, suspicious, hostile. I looked at the boy's laughing face, and wondered, and wondered.

"And how," said I, curious, "did you happen to pitch on the Bible?"

"Why, I got to studying about this chap. I wanted something that 'd *reach him.* I was puzzled. And then I remembered hearing my father say that the Bible is the most interesting book in the world because it 's the most personal. There 's something in it for everybody. So I thought there 'd be something in it for John Flint, and I tried it on him, without telling him what I was giving him. I just plunged right in, head over heels. Lord, Padre, it *is* a wonderful old book, is n't it? Why, I got so lost in it myself that I forgot all about John Flint, until I happened to glance up and see that he was up to the eyes in it, just like I was!

He likes the fights and he gloats over the spoils. He 's asking for more. I think of turning Paul loose on him."

"Well, if after the manner of men Paul fought with wild beasts at Ephesus," I said hopefully. "I dare say he 'll be able to hold his own even with John Flint."

"I like Paul best of all, myself," said Laurence. "You see, Padre, my father and I have needed a dose of Paul more than once—to stiffen our backbones. So I 'm going to turn the fighting old saint loose on John Flint. 'By, Padre—I 'll look in to-morrow—I left poor old Elijah up in a cave with no water, and the ravens overdue!"

He went down our garden path whistling, his cap on the back of his head, and I looked after him with the warm and comforting sense that the world is just that much better for such as he.

The boy was now, in his last high school year, planning to study law—all the Maynes took to law as a duck to water. Brave, simple-hearted, direct, clear-thinking, scrupulously honorable,—this was one of the diamonds used to cut the rough hard surface of Slippy McGee.

CHAPTER III

NEIGHBORS

ON a morning in late March, with a sweet and fresh wind blowing, a clear sun shining, and a sky so full of soft white woolly clouds that you might fancy the sky-people had turned their fleecy flock out to graze in the deep blue pastures, Laurence Mayne and I brought John Flint downstairs and rolled him out into the glad, green garden, in the comfortable wheel-chair that the mill-people had given us for a Christmas present; my mother and Clélie followed, and our little dog Pitache marched ahead, putting on ridiculous airs of responsibility; he being a dog with a great idea of his own importance and wholly given over to the notion that nothing could go right if he were not there to superintend and oversee it.

The wistaria was in her zenith, girdling the tree-tops with amethyst; the Cherokee rose had just begun to reign, all in snow-white velvet, with a gold crown and a green girdle for greater glory; the greedy brown grumbling bees came to her table in dusty cohorts, and over her green bowers floated her gayer lovers the early butterflies, clothed delicately as in kings' raiment. In the corners glowed the ruby-colored Japanese quince, and the long sprays of that flower I most dearly love, the spring-like spirea which the children call bridal wreath, brushed you gently as you passed the gate. I never

see it deck itself in bridal white, I never inhale its shy, clean scent, without a tightening of the throat, a misting of the eyes, a melting of the heart.

Across our garden and across Miss Sally Ruth Dexter's you could see in Major Appleby Cartwright's yard the peach trees in pink party dresses, ruffled by the wind. Down the paths marched my mother's daffodils and hyacinths, with honey-breathing sweet alyssum in between. Robins and wrens, orioles and mocking-birds, blue jays and jackdaws, thrushes and blue-birds and cardinals, all were busy house-building; one heard calls and answers, saw flashes of painted wings, followed by outbursts of ecstasy. If one should lay one's ear to the ground on such a morning I think one might hear the heart of the world.

"Hallelujah! Risen! Risen!" breathed the glad, green things, pushing from the warm mother-mold.

"Living! Living! Loving! Loving!" flashed and fluted the flying things, joyously.

We wheeled our man out into this divine freshness of renewed life, stopping the chair under a glossy, stately magnolia. My mother and Clélie and Laurence and I bustled about to make him comfortable. Pitache stood stock still, his tail stuck up like a sternly admonishing forefinger, a-bossing everything and everybody. We spread a light shawl over the man's knees, for it is not easy to bear a cruel physical infirmity, to see oneself marred and crippled, in the growing spring. He looked about him, snuffed, and wrinkled his forehead; his eyes had something of the wistful, wondering satisfaction of an animal's. He had never sat in a garden before, in all his life! Think of it!

Whenever we bring one of our Guest Roomers downstairs, Miss Sally Ruth Dexter promptly comes to her side of the fence to look him over. She came this morning, looked at our man critically, and showed plain disapproval of him in every line of her face.

On principle Miss Sally Ruth disapproves of most men and many women. She does not believe in wasting too much sympathy upon people either; she says folks get no more than they deserve and generally not half as much.

Miss Sally Ruth Dexter is a rather important person in Appleboro. She is fifty-six years old, stout, brown-eyed, suffers from a congenital incapacity to refrain from telling the unwelcome truth when people are madly trying to save their faces,—she calls this being frank,—is tactless, independent, generous, and the possessor of what she herself complacently refers to as "a Figure."

For a woman so convinced we 're all full of natural and total depravity, unoriginal sinners, worms of the dust, and the devil's natural fire-fodder, Miss Sally Ruth manages to retain a simple and unaffected goodness of practical charity toward the unelect, such as makes one marvel. You may be predestined to be lost, but while you 're here you shall lack no jelly, wine, soup, chicken-with-cream, preserves, gumbo, neither such marvelous raised bread as Miss Sally Ruth knows how to make with a perfection beyond all praise.

She has a tiny house and a tiny income, which satisfies her; she has never married. She told my mother once, cheerfully, that she guessed she must be one of those born eunuchs of the spirit the Bible mentions—

it was intended for her, and she was glad of it, for it had certainly saved her a sight of worry and trouble.

There is a cherished legend in our town that Major Appleby Cartwright once went over to Savannah on a festive occasion and was there joyously entertained by the honorable the Chatham Artillery. The Chatham Artillery brews a Punch; insidious, delectable, deceptive, but withal a pernicious strong drink that is raging, a wine that mocketh and maketh mad. And they gave it to Major Appleby Cartwright in copious draughts.

Coming home upon the heels of this, the major arose, put on his Prince Albert, donned his top hat, picked a huge bunch of zinnias, and at nine o'clock in the morning marched over to Miss Sally Ruth Dexter's.

We differ as to certain unimportant details of that historic call, but we are in the main agreed upon the conversation that ensued.

"Sally Ruth," said the major, depositing his bulky person in a rocking chair, his hat upon the floor, and wiping his forehead with a spotless handkerchief the size of a respectable sheet, "Sally Ruth, you like Old Maids?" Here he presented the zinnias.

"Why, I 've got a yard full of 'em myself, Major. Whatever made you bother to pick 'em? But to whom much hath more shall be given, I suppose," said she, resignedly, and put them on the whatnot.

"Sally Ruth," said the major solemnly, ignoring this indifferent reception of his offering. "Sally Ruth, come to think of it, an Old Maid 's a miserable, stiff, scentless sort of a flower. You might think, when you first glance at 'em, that they 're just like any other flowers, but they 're not; they 're without one single,

solitary redeemin' particle of sweetness! The Lord made 'em for a warnin' to women.

"What good under God's sky does it do you to be an old maid, Sally Ruth? You 're flyin' in the face of Providence. No lady should fly in the face of Providence—she 'd a sight better fly to the bosom of some man, where she belongs. This mawnin' I looked out of my window and my eye fell upon these unfortunate flowers. Right away I thought of you, livin' over here all alone and by yourself, with no man's bosom to lean on—you have n't really got anything but a few fowls and the Lord to love, have you? And, Sally Ruth, tears came to my eyes. Talk not of tears till you have seen the tears of warlike men! I believe it would almost scare you to death to see me cryin', Sally Ruth! I got to thinkin', and I said to myself: 'Appleby Cartwright, you have always done your duty like a man. You charged up to the very muzzle of Yankee guns once, and you were n't scared wu'th a damn! Are you goin' to be scared now? There 's a plain duty ahead of you; Sally Ruth 's a fine figure of a woman, and she ought to have a man's bosom to lean on. Go offer Sally Ruth yours!' So here I am, Sally Ruth!" said the major valiantly.

Miss Sally Ruth regarded him critically; then:

"You 're drunk, Appleby Cartwright, that 's what 's the matter with you. You and your bosom! Why, it 's not respectable to talk like that! At your age, too! I 'm ashamed of you!"

"I was a little upset, over in Savannah," admitted the major. "Those fellows must have gotten me to swallow over a gallon of their infernal brew—and it

goes down like silk, too. Listen at me: don't you ever let 'em make you drink a gallon of that punch, Sally Ruth."

"I 've seen its effects before. Go home and sleep it off," said Miss Sally Ruth, not unkindly. "If you came over to warn me about filling up on Artillery Punch, your duty 's done—I 've never been entertained by the Chatham Artillery, and I don't ever expect to be. I suppose it was intended for you to be a born goose, Appleby, so it 'd be a waste of time for me to fuss with you about it. Go on home, now, do, and let Cæsar put you to bed. Tell him to tie a wet rag about your head and to keep it wet. That 'll help to cool you off."

"Sally Ruth," said the major, laying his hand upon his heart and trying desperately to focus her with an eye that would waver in spite of him, "Sally Ruth, *somebody 's* got to do something for you, and it might as well be me. My God, Sally Ruth, *you 're settin' like clabber!* It 's a shame; it 's a cryin' shame, for you 're a fine woman. I don't mean to scare or flutter you, Sally Ruth,—no gentleman ought to scare or flutter a lady—but I 'm offerin' you my hand and heart; here 's my bosom for you to lean on."

"That Savannah brew is worse even than I thought—it 's run the man stark crazy," said Miss Sally Ruth, viewing him with growing concern.

"Me crazy! Why, I 'm askin' you," said the major with awful dignity, " I 'm askin' you to marry me!"

"Marry *you?* Marry fiddlesticks! Shucks!" said the lady.

"You won't?" Amazement made him sag down in his chair. He stared at her owl-like. "Woman," said

he solemnly, "when I see my duty I try to do it. But I warn you—it 's your last chance."

"I hope," said Miss Sally Ruth tartly, "that it 's my last chance to make a born fool of myself. Why, you old gasbag, if I had to stay in the same house with you I 'd be tempted to stick a darning needle in you to hear you explode! Appleby, I 'm like that woman that had a chimney that smoked, a dog that growled, a parrot that swore, and a cat that stayed out nights; *she* did n't need a man—and no more do I."

"Sally Ruth," said the major feelingly, "when I came here this mawnin' it was n't for my own good—it was for yours. And to think this is all the thanks I get for bein' willin' to sacrifice myself! My God! The ingratitude of women!"

He looked at Miss Sally Ruth, and Miss Sally Ruth looked at him. And then suddenly, without a moment's warning, Miss Sally Ruth rose, and took Major Appleby Cartwright, who on a time had charged Yankee guns and had n't been scared wu'th a damn, by the ear. She tugged, and the major rose, as one pulled upward by his bootstraps.

"Ouch! Turn loose! I take it back! The devil! It was n't intended for any mortal man to marry you—Sally Ruth, I would n't marry you now for forty billion dollars and a mule! Turn loose, you hussy! Turn loose!" screeched the major.

Unheeding his anguished protests, which brought Judge Hammond Mayne on the run, thinking somebody was being murdered, Miss Sally Ruth marched her suitor out of her house and led him to her front gate. Here she paused, jaws firmly set, eyes glittering, and, as with

hooks of steel, took firm hold upon the gallant major's other ear. Then she shook him; his big crimson countenance, resembling a huge overripe tomato, waggled deliriously to and fro.

"I was born"—*shake*—"an old maid,"—*shake, shake, shake*—"I have lived—by the grace of God"—*shake, shake, shake*—"an old maid, and I expect"—*shake*—"to die an old maid! I don't propose to have"—*shake*—"an old windbag offering *me* his blubbery old bosom"—*shake, shake, SHAKE*—"at this time of my life!—and don't you forget it, Appleby Cartwright! *THERE!* You go back home"—*shake, shake, shake*—"and sober up, you old gander, you!"

Major Appleby Cartwright stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once, galloping as if a company of those Yankees with whom he had once fought were upon his hindquarters with fixed bayonets.

However, they being next-door neighbors and friends of a lifetime's standing, peace was finally patched up. In Appleboro we do not mention this historic meeting when either of the participants can hear us, though it is one of our classics and no home is complete without it. The Major ever afterward eschewed Artillery Punch.

This morning, over the fence, Miss Sally Ruth addressed our invalid directly and without prelude, after her wont. She doesn't believe in beating about the bush:

"The wages of walking up and down the earth and going to and fro in it, tramping like Satan, is a lost leg. Not that it wasn't intended you should lose yours—and I hope and pray it will be a lesson to you."

"Well, take it from me," he said grimly, "there 's nobody but me collecting my wages."

A quick approval of this plain truth showed in Miss Sally Ruth's snapping eyes.

"Come!" said she, briskly. "If you 've got sense enough to see *that,* you 're not so far away from the truth as you might be. Collecting your wages is the good and the bad thing about life, I reckon. But everything 's intended, so you don't need to be too sorry for yourself, any way you look at it. And you could just as well have lost *both* legs while you were at it, you know." She paused reflectively. "Let 's see: I 've got chicken-broth and fresh rolls to-day—I 'll send you over some, after awhile." She nodded, and went back to her housework.

Laurence went on to High School, Madame had her house to oversee, I had many overdue calls; so we left Pitache and John Flint together, out in the birdhaunted, sweet-scented, sun-dappled garden, in the golden morning hours. No one can be quite heartless in a green garden, quite hopeless in the spring, or quite desolate when there 's a dog's friendly nose to be thrust into one's hand.

I am afraid that at first he missed all this; for he could think of nothing but himself and that which had befallen him, coming upon him as a bolt from the blue. He had had, heretofore, nothing but his body—and now his body had betrayed him! It had become, not the splendid engine which obeyed his slightest wish, but a drag upon him. Realizing this acutely, untrained, undisciplined, he was savagely sullen, impenetrably morose.

He tired of Laurence's reading—I think the boy's free quickness of movement, his well-knit, handsome body, the fact that he could run and jump as pleased him, irked and chafed the man new and unused to his own physical infirmity.

He seemed to want none of us; I have seen him savagely repulse the dog, who, shocked and outraged at this exhibition of depravity, withdrew, casting backward glances of horrified and indignant reproach.

But as the lovely, peaceful, healing days passed, that bitter and contracted heart had to expand somewhat. Gradually the ferocity faded, leaving in its room an anxious and brooding wonder. God knows what thoughts passed through that somber mind in those long hours, when, concentrated upon himself, he must have faced the problem of his future and, like one before an impassable stone wall, had to fall back, baffled. He could be sure of only one thing: that never again could he be what he had been once—"the slickest cracksman in America." This in itself tortured him. Heretofore, life had been exactly what he chose to make it: he had put himself to the test, and he had proven himself the most daring, the coolest, shrewdest, most cunning, in that sinister world in which he had shone with so evil a light. *He had been Slippy McGee.* Sure of himself, his had been that curious inverted pride which is the stigmata of the criminal.

More than once I saw him writhe in his chair, tormented, shaken, spent with futile curses, impotently lamenting his lost kingdom. He still had the skill, the cold calculating brain, the wit, the will; and now, by a cruel chance and a stupid accident, he had lost out! The

end had come for him, and he in his heyday! There were moments when, watching him, I had the sensation as of witnessing almost visibly, here in our calm sunny garden, the Dark Powers fighting openly for a soul.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

CHAPTER IV

UNDERWINGS

IF I have not heretofore spoken of Mary Virginia, it is because all that winter she and Mrs. Eustis had been away; and in consequence Appleboro was dull enough. For the Eustises are our wealthiest and most important family, just as the Eustis house, with its pillared, Greek-temple-effect front, is by far the handsomest house in town. When we have important folks to entertain, we look to the Eustises to save our faces for us by putting them up at their house.

One afternoon, shortly after we had gotten settled in Appleboro, I came home to find my mother entertaining no less a personage than Mrs. Eustis; she was n't calling on the Catholic priest and his mother, you understand; far from it! She was recognizing Armand De Rancé and Adele de Marsignan!

Mrs. Eustis was a fair, plump little partridge of a woman, so perfectly satisfied with herself that brains, in her case, would have amounted to a positive calamity. She is an instance of the fascination a fool seems to have for men of undoubted powers of mind and heart, for Eustis, who had both to an unusual degree, loved her devotedly, even while he smiled at her. She had, after some years of childlessness, laid him under an everlasting obligation by presenting him with a daughter, an

obligation deepened by the fact that the child was in every sense her father's child, not her mother's.

That afternoon she brought the little girl with her, to make our acquaintance. When the child, shyly friendly, looked up, it seemed to me for an anguished moment as if another little girl had walked out of the past, so astonishingly like was she to that little lost playmate of my youth. Right then and there Mary Virginia walked into my heart and took possession, as of a place swept and garnished and long waiting her coming.

When we knew her better my mother used to say that if she could have chosen a little girl instead of the little boy that had been I, she must have chosen Mary Virginia Eustis out of all the world.

Like Judge Mayne's Laurence, she chose to make the Parish House her second home—for indeed my mother ever seemed to draw children to her, as by some delightful magic. Here, then, the child learned to sew and to embroider, to acquire beautiful housewifely accomplishments, and to speak French with flawless perfection; she reaped the benefit of my mother's girlhood spent in a convent in France; and Mrs. Eustis was far too shrewd not to appreciate the value of this. And so we acquired Mary Virginia.

I watched the lovely miracle of her growth with an almost painful tenderness. Had I not become a priest, had I realized those spring hopes of mine; and had there been little children resembling their mother, then my own little girls had been like this one. Even thus had been their blue eyes, and theirs, too, such hair of such curling blackness.

The hours I spent with the little girl and Laurence

helped me as well as them; these fresh souls and growing minds freshened and revived mine, and kept me young in heart.

"We are all made of dust," said my mother once. "But Mary Virginia's is star dust. Star dust, and dew, and morning gold," she added musingly.

"She simply cannot imagine evil, much less see it in anything or in anybody," I told Madame, for at times the child's sheer innocence troubled me for her. "One is puzzled how to bring home to this naïve soul the ugly truth that all is not good. Now, Laurence is better balanced. He takes people and events with a saving grain of skepticism. But Mary Virginia is divinely blind."

My mother regarded me with a tolerant smile. "Do not worry too much over that divinely blind one, my son," said she. "I assure you, she is quite capable of seeing a steeple in daylight! Observe this: yesterday Laurence angered her, and she seized him by the hair and bumped his head against the study wall—no mild thump, either! She has in her quite enough of the leaven of unrighteousness to save her, at a pinch—for Laurence was entirely right, she entirely wrong. Yet—she made him apologize before she consented to forgive him, and he did it gratefully. She allowed him to understand how magnanimous she was in thus pardoning him for her own naughtiness, and he was deeply impressed, as men-creatures should be under such circumstances. Such wisdom, and she but a child! I was enchanted!"

"Good heavens! Surely, Mother, I misunderstand you! Surely you reproved her!"

"Reprove her?" My mother's voice was full of astonishment. "Why should I reprove her? She was perfectly right!"

"Perfectly right? Why, you said—indeed, I assure you, you said that Laurence had been entirely right, she entirely wrong!"

"Oh, *that!* I see; well, as for that, she was."

"Then, surely—"

"My son, a woman who is in the wrong is entirely right when she makes the man apologize," said my mother firmly. "That is the Law, fixed as the Medes' and the Persians', and she who forgets or ignores it is ground between the upper and the nether millstones. Mary Virginia remembered and obeyed. When she grows up you will all of you adore her madly. Why, then, should she be reproved?"

I have never been able to reflect upon Laurence getting his head bumped and then gratefully apologizing to the darling shrew who did it, without a cold wind stirring my hair. And yet—Laurence, and I, too, love her all the more dearly for it! *Miserere, Domine!*

It was May when Mary Virginia came back to Appleboro. She had written us a bubbling letter, telling us just when we were to expect her, and how happy she was at the thought of being home once more. We, too, rejoiced, for we had missed her sadly. My mother was so happy that she planned a little intimate feast to celebrate the child's return.

I remember how calm and mild an evening it was. At noon there had been a refreshing shower, and the air was deliciously pure and clear, and full of wet woodsy scents. The raindrops fringing the bushes became

prisms, a spiderweb was a fairy foot-bridge; and all our birds, leaving for a moment such household torments as squalling insatiable mouths that must be filled, became jubilant choristers. "The opulent dyepots of the angels" had been emptied lavishly across the sky, and the old Parish House lay steeped in a serene and heavenly glow, every window glittering diamond-bright to the west.

Next door Miss Sally Ruth was feeding and scolding her cooing pigeons, which fluttered about her, lighting upon her shoulder, surrounding her with a bright-colored living cloud; the judge's black cat Panch lay along the Mayne side of the fence and blinked at them regretfully with his slanting emerald eyes. From the Mayne kitchen-steps came, faintly, Daddy January's sweet quavering old voice:

> "— Gwine tuh climb up higher 'n' higher,
> Some uh dese days —"

John Flint, silent, depressed, with folded lips and somber eyes, hobbled about awkwardly, savagely training himself to use the crutches Westmoreland had lately brought him. Very unlovely he looked, dragging himself along like a wounded beast. The poor wretch struck a discordant note in the sweet peacefulness of the spring evening; nor could we say anything to comfort him, we who were not maimed.

Came a high, sweet, shrill call at the gate; a high yelp of delight from Pitache, hurtling himself forward like a woolly white cannonball; a sound of light and flying feet; and Mary Virginia ran into the garden, the little overjoyed dog leaping frantically about her. She

wore a white frock, and over it a light scarlet jacket. Her blue eyes were dancing, lighting her sweet and fresh face, colored like a rose. The gay little breeze that came along with her stirred her skirts, and fluttered her scarlet ribbons, and the curls about her temples. You might think Spring herself had paused for a lovely moment in the Parish House garden and stood before you in this gracious and virginal shape, at once delicate and vital.

Miss Sally Ruth, scattering pigeons right and left, dashed to the fence to call greetings. My mother, seizing the child by the arms, held her off a moment, to look her over fondly; then, drawing her closer, kissed her as a daughter is kissed.

I laid my hand on the child's head, happy with that painful happiness her presence always occasioned me, when she came back after an absence—as if the Other Girl flashed into view for a quick moment, and then was gone. Laurence, who had followed, stood looking down at her with boyish condescension.

"Huh! I can eat hominy off her head!" said he, aggravatingly.

"Old Mister Biggity!" flashed Mary Virginia. And then she turned and met, face to face, the fixed stare of John Flint, hanging upon his crutches as one might upon a cross,—a stare long, still, intent, curious, speculative, almost incredulous.

"You are the Padre's last guest, are n't you?" her eyes were full of gravest sympathy. "I 'm so sorry you met with such a misfortune—but I 'm gladder you 're alive. It 's so good just to be alive in the spring, is n't it?" She smiled at him directly, taking him, as it were, into a pleasant confidence. She seemed perfectly un-

conscious of the evil unloveliness of him; Mary Virginia always seemed to miss the evil, passing it over as if it did n't exist. Instead, diving into the depths of other personalities, always she brought to the surface whatever pearl of good might lie concealed at the bottom. To her this sinister cripple was simply another human being, with whose misfortune one must sympathize humanly.

Clélie, in a speckless white apron and a brand-new red-and-white bandanna to do greater honor to the little girl whom she adored, set a table under the trees and spread it with the thin dainty sandwiches, the delectable little cakes, and the fine bonbons she and my mother had made to celebrate the child's return. And we had tea, making very merry, for she had a thousand amusing things to tell us, every airy trifle informed with something of her own brave bright mirthful spirit. John Flint sat nearby in the wheel chair, his crutches lying beside it, and looked on silently and ate his cake and drank his tea stolidly, as if it were no unusual thing for him to break bread in such company.

"Padre," said Mary Virginia with deep gravity. "My aunt Jenny says I 'm growing up. She says I 'll have to put up my hair and let down my frocks pretty soon, and that I 'll probably be thinking of beaux in another year, though she hopes to goodness I won't, until I 've got through with school at least."

The almost unconscious imitation of Miss Jenny's pecking, birdlike voice made me smile.

"Beaux! Long skirts! Put up hair! Great Scott, will you listen to the kid!" scoffed Laurence. "You everlasting little silly, you! P'tite Madame, these cakes

are certainly all to the good. May I have another two or three, please?"

"I 'm 'most thirteen years old, Laurence Mayne," said Mary Virginia, with dignity. "You 're only seventeen, so you don't need to give yourself such hateful airs. You 're not too old to be greedy, anyhow. Padre, *am* I growing up?"

"I fear so, my child," said I, gloomily.

"You 're not glad, either, are you, Padre?"

"But you were such a delightful child," I temporized.

"Oh, lovely!" said Laurence, eying her with unflattering brotherliness. "And she had so much feeling, too, Mary Virginia! Why, when I was sick once, she wanted me to die, so she could ride to my funeral in the front carriage; she doted on funerals, the little ghoul! She was horribly disappointed when I got better—she thought it disobliging of me, and that I 'd done it to spite her. Once, too, when I tried to reason with her—and Mary Virginia needed reason if ever a kid did—she bumped my head until I had knots on it. There 's your delightful Mary Virginia for you!"

"Anyhow, you did n't die and become an angel—you stayed disagreeably alive and you 're going to become a lawyer," said Mary Virginia, too gently. "And your head was bumpable, Laurence, though I 'm sorry to say I don't ever expect to bump it again. Why, I 'm going away to school and when I come back I 'll be Miss Eustis, and you 'll be Mr. Mayne! Won't it be funny, though?"

"I don't see anything funny in calling you Miss Eustis," said Laurence, with boyish impatience. "And I 'm certainly not going to notice you if you 're silly

enough to call me Mister Mayne. I hope you won't be a fool, Mary Virginia. So many girls are fools." He ate another cake.

"Not half as big fools as boys are, though," said she, dispassionately. "My father says the man is always the bigger fool of the two."

Laurence snorted. "I wonder what we 'll be like, though—both of us?" he mused.

"You? You 're biggity now, but you 'll be lots worse, then," said Mary Virginia, with unflattering frankness. "I think you 'll probably strut like a turkey, and you 'll be baldheaded, and wear double-lensed horn spectacles, and spats, and your wife will call you 'Mr. Mayne' to your face and 'Your Poppa' to the children, and she 'll perfectly *despise* people like Madame and the Padre and me!"

"You never did have any reasoning power, Mary Virginia," said Laurence, with brotherly tact. "Our black cat Panch would put it all over you. Allow me to inform you I 'm *not* biggity, miss! I 'm logical—something a girl can't understand. And I 'd like to know what you think *you 're* going to grow up to be?"

"Oh, let 's quit talking about it," she said petulantly. "I hate to think of growing up. Grown ups don't seem to be happy—and *I* want to be happy!" She turned her head, and met once more the absorbed and watchful stare of the man in the wheel-chair.

"Were n't you sorry when you had to stop being a little boy and grow up?" she asked him, wistfully.

"Me?" he laughed harshly. "I could n't say, miss. I guess I was born grown up." His face darkened.

"That was n't a bit fair," said she, with instant sympathy.

"There 's a lot not fair," he told her, "when you 're born and brought up like I was. The worst is not so much what happens to you, though that 's pretty bad; it 's that you don't know it 's happening—and there 's nobody to put you wise. Why," his forehead puckered as if a thought new to him had struck him, "why, your very looks get to be different!"

Mary Virginia started. "Oh, looks!" said she, thoughtfully. "Now, is n't it curious for you to say just that, right now, for it reminds me that I brought something to the Padre—something that set me to thinking about people's looks, too,—and how you never can tell. Wait a minute, and I 'll show you." She reached for the pretty crocheted bag she had brought with her, and drew from it a small pasteboard box. None of us, idly watching her, dreamed that a moment big with fate was upon us. I have often wondered how things would have turned out if Mary Virginia had lost or forgotten that pasteboard box!

"I happened to put my hand on a tree—and this little fellow moved, and I caught him. I thought at first he was a part of the tree-trunk, he looked so much like it," said the child, opening the little box. Inside lay nothing more unusual than a dark-colored and rather ugly gray moth, with his wings folded down.

"One would n't think him pretty, would one?" said she, looking down at the creature.

"No," said Flint, who had wheeled nearer, and craned his neck over the box. "No, miss, I should n't think I 'd

call something like that pretty,''—he looked from the moth to Mary Virginia, a bit disappointedly.

Mary Virginia smiled, and picking up the little moth, held his body, very gently, between her finger-tips. He fluttered, spreading out his gray wings; and then one saw the beautiful pansy-like underwings, and the glorious lower pair of scarlet velvet barred and bordered with black.

''I brought him along, thinking the Padre might like him, and tell me something about him,'' said the little girl. ''The Padre 's crazy about moths and butterflies, you must understand, and we 're always on the lookout to get them for him. I never found this particular one before, and you can't imagine how I felt when he showed me what he had hidden under that gray cloak of his!''

''He 's a member of a large and most respectable family, the Catocalæ,'' I told her. ''I 'll take him, my dear, and thank you—there 's always a demand for the Catocalæ. And you may call him an Underwing, if you prefer—that 's his common name.''

''I got to thinking,'' said the little girl, thoughtfully, lifting her clear and candid eyes to John Flint's. ''I got to thinking, when he threw aside his plain gray cloak and showed me his lovely underwings, that he 's like some people—people you 'd think were very common, you know. You could n't be expected to know what was underneath, could you? So you pass them by, thinking how ordinary, and matter of fact, and uninteresting and even ugly they are, and you feel rather sorry for them—because you don't know. But if you can once get close enough to touch them—why, then you find out!'' Her eyes grew deeper, and brighter, as they do when she

is moved; and the color came more vividly to her cheek. "Don't you reckon," said she naïvely, "that plenty of folks are like him? They 're the sad color of the street-dust, of course, for things do borrow from their surroundings, did n't you know that? That 's called protective mimicry, the Padre says. So you only think of the dust-colored outside—and all the while the underwings are right there, waiting for you to find them! Is n't it wonderful and beautiful? And the best of all is, it 's true!"

The cripple in the chair put out his hand with a hint of timidity in his manner; he was staring at Mary Virginia as if some of the light within her had dimly penetrated his grosser substance.

"Could I hold it—for a minute—in my own hand?" he asked, turning brick-red.

"Of course you may," said Mary Virginia pleasantly. "I see by the Padre's face this is n't a rare moth—he 's been here all along, only my eyes have just been opened to him. I don't want him to go in any collection. I don't want him to go anywhere, except back into the air—I owe him that for what he taught me. So I 'm sure the Padre won't mind, if you 'd like to set him free, yourself."

She put the moth on the man's finger, delicately, for a Catocala is a swift-winged little chap; it spread out its wings splendidly, as if to show him its loveliness; then, darting upward, vanished into the cool green depth of the shrubbery.

"I remember running after a butterfly once, when I was a kid," said he. "He came flying down our street, Lord knows where from or why, and I caught him after

a chase. I thought he was the prettiest thing ever my eyes had seen, and I wanted the worst way in the world to keep him with me. A brown fellow he was, all sprinkled over with little splotches of silver, as if there 'd been plenty of the stuff on hand, and it 'd been laid on him thick. But after awhile I got to thinking he 'd feel like he was in jail, shut up in my hot fist. I could n't bear that, so I ran to the end of the street, to save him from the other kids, and then I turned him loose and watched him beat it for the sky. They 're pretty things, butterflies. Somehow I always liked them better than any other living creatures.'' He was staring after the moth, his forehead wrinkled. He spoke almost unconsciously, and he certainly had no idea that he had given us cause for a hopeful astonishment.

Now, Mary Virginia's eyes had fallen, idly enough, upon John Flint's hands lying loosely upon his knees. Her face brightened.

''Padre,'' she suggested suddenly, ''why don't you let him help you with your butterflies? Look at his hands! Why, they 're just exactly the right sort to handle setting needles and mounting blocks, and to stretch wings without loosening a scale. He could be taught in a few lessons, and just think what a splendid help he could be! And you do so need help with those insects of yours, Padre—I 've heard you say so, over and over.''

The child was right—John Flint did have good hands —large enough, well-shaped, steel-muscled, powerful, with flexible, smooth-skinned, sensitive fingers, the fingers of an expert lapidary rather than a prize-fighter.

''If you think there 's any way I could help the par-

son for awhile, I 'd be proud to try, miss. It 's true," he added casually, with a sphinx-like immobility of countenance, "that I 'm what might be called handy with my fingers."

"We 'll call it settled, then," said Mary Virginia happily.

Laurence took her home at dusk; it was a part of his daily life to look after Mary Virginia, as one looks after a cherished little sister. When they were younger the boy had often complained that she might as well be his sister, she quarreled with him so much; and the little girl said, bitterly, he was as disagreeable as if he 'd been a brother. In spite of which the little girl, for all her delicious impertinences, looked up to the boy; and the boy had adored her, from the time she gurgled at him from her cradle.

My mother left us, and John Flint and I sat outdoors in the pleasant twilight, he smoking the pipe Laurence had given him.

"Parson," said he, abruptly, "Parson, you folks are swells, ain't you? The real thing, I mean, you and Madame? Even the yellow nigger 's a lady nigger, ain't she?"

"I am a poor priest, such as you see, my son, Madame is—Madame. And Clélie is a good servant."

"But you were born a swell, were n't you?" he persisted. "Old family, swell diggings, trained flunkies, and all that?"

"I was born a gentleman, if that is what you mean. Of an old family, yes. And there was an old house—once."

"How 'd *you* ever hit the trail for the Church? I

wonder! But say, you never asked me any more questions than you had to, so you can tell me to shut up, if you want to. Not that I would n't like to know how the Sam Hill the like of you ever got nabbed by the skypilots."

"God called me through affliction, my son."

"Oh," said my son, blankly. "Huh! But I bet you the best crib ever cracked you were some peach of a boy before you got that 'S. O. S.'"

"I was, like the young, the thoughtless young, a sinner."

"I suppose," said he tentatively, after a pause, "that *I 'm* one hell of a sinner myself, according to Hoyle, ain't I?"

"I do not think it would injure you to change your—course of life, nor yet your way of mentioning it," I said, feeling my way cautiously. "But—we are bidden to remember there is more joy in heaven over one sinner saved than over the ninety-and-nine just men."

"Is that so? Well, it listens like good horse-sense to me," said Mr. Flint, promptly. "Because, look here: you can rake in ninety-and-nine boobs any old time—there 's one born every time the clock ticks, parson—but they don't land something like *me* every day, believe me! And I bet you a stack of dollar chips a mile high there was some song-and-dance in the sky-joint when they put one over on *you* for fair. Sure!" He puffed away at his pipe, and I, having nothing to say to this fine reasoning, held my peace.

"Parson, that kid 's a swell, too, ain't she? And the boy?"

"Laurence is the son of Judge Hammond Mayne."

"And the little girl?" Insensibly his voice softened.

"I suppose," I agreed, "that the little girl is what you might call a swell, too."

"I never," said he, reflectively, "came what you might call *talking* close to real swells before. I 've seen 'em, of course—at a distance. Some of 'em, taking 'em by and large, looked pretty punk, to me; some of 'em was middling, and a few looked as if they might have the goods. But none of 'em struck me as being real live breathing *people*, same as other folks. Why, parson, some of those dames 'd throw a fit, fancying they was poisoned, if they had to breathe the same air with folks like me—me being what I am and they being—what they think they are. Yet here 's you and Madame, the real thing—and the boy—and the little girl—the little girl—" he stopped, staring at me dumbly, as the vision of Mary Virginia rose before him.

"She is, indeed, a dear, dear child," said I. His words stung me somewhat, for once upon a time, I myself would have resented that such as he should have breathed the same air with Mary Virginia.

"I 'd almost think I 'd dreamed her," said he, thoughtfully, "that is, if I was good enough to have dreams like that," he added hastily, with his first touch of shame. "I 've seen 'em from the Battery up, and some of 'em was sure-enough queens, but I did n't know they came like this one. She 's bran-new to me, parson. Say, you just show me what she wants me to help you with, and I 'll do it. She seems to think I can, and it ought n't to be any harder than opening a time-vault, ought it?"

"No," said I gravely, "I should n't think it would

be. Though I never opened a time-vault, you understand, and I hope and pray you 'll never touch one again, either. I 'd rather you would n't even refer to it, please. It makes me feel, rather—well, let 's say *particeps criminis.*"

"I suppose that 's the polite for punching you in the wind," said he, just as gravely. "And I did n't think you 'd ever monkeyed with a vault; why, you could n't, not if you was to try till Gabriel did his little turn in the morning—not unless you 'd been caught when you were softer and put wise. Man, it 's a bigger job than you think, and you 've got to have the know-how and the nerve before you can put it over. But there—I 'll keep it dark, seeing you want me to." He stretched out his hands, regarding them speculatively. "They *are* classy mitts," he remarked impersonally. "Yep, seemed like they were just naturally made to—do what they did. They were built for fine work." At that his jaw snapped; a spasm twitched his face; it darkened.

"The work little Miss Eustis suggested for you," I insinuated hastily, "is what very many people consider very fine work indeed. About one in a thousand can do it properly."

"Lead me to it," said he wearily, and without enthusiasm, "and turn me loose. I 'll do what I can, to please her. At least, until I can make a getaway for keeps."

CHAPTER V

ENTER KERRY

WHEN I was first seen prowling along the roads and about the fields stalking butterflies and diurnal moths with the caution of a red Indian on the warpath and the stealth of a tiger in the jungle; when mystified folk met me at night, a lantern suspended from my neck, a haversack across my shoulders, a bottle-belt about my waist, and armed with a butterfly net, the consensus of opinion was that poor Father De Rancé was stark staring mad. Appleboro had n't heretofore witnessed the proceedings of the Brethren of the Net, and I had to do much patient explaining; even then I am sure I must have left many firmly convinced that I was not, in their own phrase, "all there."

"Hey, you! Mister! Them worms is pizen! Them 's *fever*-worms!" was shrieked at me frenziedly by the country-folks, black and white, when I was caught scooping up the hairy caterpillars of the tiger moths. Even when it was understood that I wished caterpillars, cocoons, and chrysalids, for the butterflies and moths they would later make, looks of pitying contempt were cast upon me. That a grown man—particularly a minister of the gospel, with not only his own but other people's souls to save—should spend time hunting for

worms, with which he could n't even bait a hook, awakened amazement.

"What any man in his right mind wants with a thing that ain't nothin' but wriggles an' hair on the outside an' sqush on the inside, beats me!" was said more than once.

"But all of them are interesting, some are valuable, and many grow into very beautiful moths and butterflies," I ventured to defend myself.

"S'posin' they do? You can't eat 'em or wear 'em or plant 'em, can you?" And really, you understand, I could n't!

"An' you mean to tell me to my face," said a scandalized farmer, watching me assorting and naming the specimens taken from my field box, "you mean to tell me you 're givin' every one o' them bugs a *name,* same 's a baptized Christian? Adam named every livin' thing, an' Adam called them things Caterpillars an' Butterflies. If it suited him an' Eve and God A'mighty to have 'em called that an' nothin' else, looks to me it had oughter suit anybody that 's got a grain o' real religion. If you go to call 'em anythin' else it 's sinnin' agin the Bible. I 've heard all my life you Cath'lics don't take as much stock in the Scripters as you 'd oughter, but this thing o' callin' a wurrum Adam named plain Caterpillar a —a—*what 'd* you say the dum beast's name was? *My sufferin' Savior!* is jest about the wust dern foolishness yet! I lay it at the Pope's door, every mite o' it, an' you 'd better believe he 'll have to answer for sech carryin's on, some o' these days!"

So many other things having been laid at the Pope's door, I held my peace and made no futile attempt to clear

the Holy Father of the dark suspicion of having perpetrated their names upon certain of the American lepidoptera.

I had yet other darker madnesses; had I not been seen spreading upon trees with a whitewash brush a mixture of brown sugar, stale beer, and rum?

Asked to explain this lunatic proceeding I could only say that I was sugaring for moths; these airy fairy gentlemen having a very human liking for a "wee drappie o't."

"That amiable failin'," Major Appleby Cartwright decided, "is a credit to them an' commends them to a respectful hearin'. On its face it would seem to admit them to the ancient an' honorable brotherhood of convivial man. But, suh, there 's another side to this question, an' it 's this:—a creature that 's got six perfectly good legs, not to mention wings, an' still can't carry his liquor without bein' caught, deserves his fate. It 's not in my line to offer suggestions to an allwise Providence, or I *might* hint that a scoop-net an' a killing jar in pickle for some two-legged topers out huntin' free drinks would n't be such a bad idea at all."

But as I pursued my buggy way—and displayed, save in this one particular, what might truthfully be called ordinary common sense—people gradually grew accustomed to it, looking upon me as a mild and harmless lunatic whose inoffensive mania might safely be indulged —nay, even humored. In consequence I was from time to time inundated with every common thing that creeps, crawls, and flies. I accepted gifts of bugs and caterpillars that filled my mother with disgust and Clélie with horror; both of them hesitated to come into my study,

and I have known Clélie to be afraid to go to bed of a night because the great red-horned "Hickory devil" was downstairs in a box, and she was firmly convinced that this innocent worm harbored a cold-blooded desire to crawl upstairs and bite her. That silly woman will depart this life in the firm faith that all crawling creatures came into the world with the single-hearted hope of biting her, above all other mortals; and that having achieved the end for which they were created, both they and she will immediately curl up and die.

But alas, I had but scant time to devote to this enchanting and engrossing study, which, properly pursued, will fill a man's days to the brim. I gathered my specimens as I could and classified and mounted them as it pleased God—until the advent of John Flint.

Now, I must, with great reluctance, here set down the plain truth that he, too, looked upon me at first with amaze not unmixed with rage and contempt. Most caterpillars, you understand, feed upon food of their own arbitrary choosing; and when they are in captivity one must procure this particular aliment if one hopes to rear them.

Slippy McGee feeding bugs! It was about as hideous and devil-born a contretemps as, say, putting a belted earl to peel potatoes or asking an archbishop to clean cuspidors. The man boiled with offended dignity and outraged pride. One could actually see him swell. He had expected something quite different, and this apparently offensive triviality disgusted and shocked him. I could see myself falling forty thousand fathoms in his esteem, and I think he would have incontinently turned his back upon me save for his promise to Mary Virginia.

It is true that many of the caterpillars are ugly and formidable, poor things, to the uninitiated eye, which fails to recognize under this uncomely disguise the crowned and glorious citizens of the air. I had just then a great Cecropia, an able-bodied green gentleman armed with twelve thorn-like, sizable horns, and wearing, along with other agreeable adornments, three yellow and four red arrangements like growths of dwarf cactus plants on the segments behind his hard round green head.

Mr. Flint, with an ejaculation of horror, backed off on one crutch and clubbed the other.

"My God!" said he, "Kill it! Kill it!" I saved my green friend in the nick of time. The man, with staring eyes, looked from me to the caterpillar; then he leaned over and watched it, in grim silence.

He knotted his forehead, made slits of his eyes, gulped, screwed his mouth into the thin red line of deadly determination, and with every nerve braced, even as a martyr braces himself for the stake or the sword, put out his hand, up which the formidable-looking worm walked leisurely. Death not immediately resulting from this daring act, he controlled his shudders and breathed easier. The worm became less and less terrifying; no longer appearing, say, the size of the boa constrictor. A few moments of this harmless meandering about Mr. Flint's hand and arm, and of a sudden he wore his true colors of an inoffensive and law-abiding larva, anxious only to attend strictly to his own legitimate business, the Gargantuan feeding of himself into the pupa from which he would presently emerge one of the most magnificent of native moths. Gingerly Mr. Flint picked him up between thumb and fore-finger, and as gingerly

dropped him back into the breeding-cage. He squared his shoulders, wiped his brow, and drew a long whistling breath.

"Phe-ew! It took all my nerve to do it!" said he, frankly. "I felt for a minute as if a strong-arm cop 'd chased me up an alley and pulled his gun on me. The feeling of a bug's legs on your bare skin is something fierce at first, ain't it? But after *him* none of 'em can scare me any more. I could play tag with pink monkeys with blue tails and green whiskers without sending in the hurry-call."

The setting boards and blocks, the arrays of pins, needles, tubes, forceps, jars and bottles, magnifying-glasses, microscope, slides, drying-ovens, relaxing-box, cabinets, and above all, the mounted specimens, raised his spirits somewhat. This, at least, looked workmanlike; this, at least, promised something better than stoking worms!

If not hopefully, at least willingly enough, he allowed himself to be set to work. And that work had come in what some like to call the psychological moment. At least it came—or was sent—just when he needed it most.

He soon discovered, as all beginners must, that there is very much more to it than one might think; that here, too, one must pay for exact knowledge with painstaking care and patient study and ceaseless effort. He discovered how fatally easy it is to spoil a good specimen; how fairy-fragile a wee wing is; how painted scales rub, and vanish into thin air; how delicate antennæ break, and forelegs will fiendishly depart hence; and that proper mounting, which results in a perfect insect, is a task

which requires practice, a sure eye, and an expert, delicate, and dexterous touch. Also, that one must be ceaselessly on guard lest the baleful little ant and other tiny curses evade one's vigilance and render void one's best work. He learned these and other salutary lessons, which tend to tone down an amateur's conceit of his half-knowledge; and this chastened him. He felt his pride at stake—he who could so expertly, with almost demoniac ingenuity, force the costliest and most cunningly constructed burglar-proof lock; he whose not idle boast was that he was handy with his fingers! Slippy McGee baffled, at bay before a butterfly? And in the presence of a mere priest and a girl-child? Never! He 'd show us what he could do when he really tried to try!

Presently he wanted to classify; and he wanted to do it alone and unaided—it looked easy enough. It irked him, pricked his pride, to have to be always asking somebody else "what is this?" And right then and there those inevitable difficulties that confront every earnest and conscientious seeker at the beginning of his quest, arose, as the fascinating living puzzles presented themselves for his solving.

To classify correctly is not something one learns in a day, be he never so willing and eager; as one may discover who cares to take half a dozen plain, obscurely-colored small moths, and attempts to put them in their proper places.

Mr. Flint tried it—and those wretched creatures *would n't* stay put. It seemed to him that every time he looked at them they ought to be somewhere else; always there was something—a bar, a stripe, a small dis-

tinctive spot, a wing of peculiar shape, antennæ, or palpi, or spur, to differentiate them.

"Where the Sam Hill," he blazed, "do all these footy little devils come from, anyhow? Where am I to put a beast of a bug when the next one that 's exactly like it is entirely different the next time you look at it? There 's too much beginning and no end at all to this game!"

For all that, he followed them up. I saw with pure joy that he refused to dismiss anything carelessly, while he scorned to split hairs. He had a regular course of procedure when he was puzzled. First he turned the new insect over and over and glared at it from every possible angle; then he rumpled his hair, gritted his teeth, squared his shoulders and hurled himself into work.

There was, for instance, the common Dione Vanillæ, that splendid Gulf Fritillary which haunts all the highways of the South. She 's a long-wing, but she 's not a Heliconian; she 's a silver-spot, but she 's not an Argynnis. She bears a striking family likeness to her fine relations, but she has certain structural peculiarities which differentiate her. Whose word should he take for this, and why? Wherein lay those differences? He began, patiently, with her cylinder-shaped yellow-brown, orange-spotted caterpillar, on the purple passion flowers in our garden; he watched it change into a dark-brown chrysalis marked with a few pale spots; he saw emerge from this the red-robed lady herself, with her long fulvous forewings, and her shorter hind wings smocked with black velvet, and her under-frock flushed with pinkish orange and spangled with silver. And yet, in spite

of her long marvelous tongue—he was beginning to find out that no tool he had ever seen, and but few that God Himself makes, is so wonderful as a butterfly's tongue—she had n't been able to tell him that about herself which he most wished to find out. *That* called for a deeper knowledge than he as yet possessed.

But he knew that other men knew. And he had to know. He meant to know. For the work gripped him as it does those marked and foreordained for its service. That marvelous world in which the Little People dwell —a world so absolutely different from ours that it might well be upon another planet—began to open, slowly, slowly, one of its many mysterious doors, allowing him just glimpse enough of what magic lay beyond to fire his heart and to whet his appetite. And he could n't break into that world with a jimmy. It was burglar-proof. That portal was so impervious to even the facile fingers of Slippy McGee, that John Flint must pay the inevitable and appropriate toll to enter!

Westmoreland had replaced his crutches with a wooden leg, and you might see him stumping about our grounds, minutely examining the underside of shrubs and bushes, the bark of trees, poking into corners and crannies, or scraping in the mold under the fallen leaves by the fences, for things which no longer filled him with aversion and disgust, but with the student's interest and pleasure.

"Think of me being in the same world with 'em all these years and not knowing a thing about 'em when there 's so much to know, and under my skin stark crazy to learn it, only I did n't know I even wanted to know what I really want to know more than anything

else, until I had to get dumped down here to find it out! I get the funniest sort of a feeling, parson, that all along there 's been a Me tucked away inside my hide that 's been loving these things ever since I was born. Not just to catch and handle 'em, and stretch out their little wings, and remember the names some bughouse highbrow wished on 'em, though all that 's in the feeling, too; it 's something else, if I could make you understand what I mean."

I laughed. "I think I do understand," said I. "I have a Me like that tucked away in mine, too, you know."

He looked at me gravely. "Parson," said he, earnestly, "there 's times I wish you had a dozen kids, and every one of 'em twins! It 's a shame to think of some poor orphans swindled out of such a daddy as you 'd have made!"

"Why," said I, smiling, "*You* are one of my twins."

"Me?" He reflected. "Maybe half of me might be, parson," he agreed, "but it 's not safe for a skypilot to be caught owning a twin like the other half."

"I 'm pinning my faith to *my* half," said I, serenely.

"Now, why?" he asked, with sudden fierceness. "I turn it over and over and over: it looks white on the outside, but I can't to save me figure out *why* you 're doing it. Parson, *what* have you got up your sleeve?"

"Nothing but my arm. What should you think?"

"I don't know what to think, and that 's the straight of it. What 's your game, anyhow? What in the name of God are you after?"

"Why, I think," said I, "that in the name of God I 'm after—that other You that 's been tucked away all these years, and could n't get born until a Me inside mine, just

like himself, called him to come out and be alive."

He pondered this in silence. Then:

"I 'll take your word for it," said he. "Though if anybody 'd ever told me I 'd be eating out of a parson's hand, I 'd have pushed his face in for him. Yep, I 'm Fido! *Me!*"

"At least you growl enough," said I, tartly.

He eyed me askance.

"Have I got to lick hands?" he snarled.

I walked away, without a reply; through my shoulder-blades I could feel him glaring after me. He followed, hobbling:

"Parson!"

"Well?"

"If I 'm not the sort that licks hands I 'm not the sort that bites 'em, neither. I 'll tell you—it 's this way: I—sort of get to chewing on that infernal log of wood that 's where my good leg used to grow and—and splinters get into my temper—and I 've *got* to snarl or burst wide open! You 'd growl like the devil yourself, if you had to try holding down my job for awhile, sky-pilot or no skypilot!"

"Why—I dare say I should," said I, contritely. "But," I added, after a pause, "I should n't be any the better for it, should you think?"

"Not so you could notice," shortly. And after a moment he added, in an altered voice: "Rule 1: Can the Squeal!"

I think he most honestly tried to. It was no easy task, and I have seen the sweat start upon his forehead and his face go pale, when in his eagerness he forgot for a moment the cruel fact that he could no longer

move as lightly as of old—and the crippled body, betraying him, reminded him all too swiftly of his mistake.

The work saved him. For it is the heaven-sent sort of work, to those ordained for it, that fills one's hours and leaves one eager for further tasks. It called for all his oldtime ingenuity. His tools, for instance—at times their limitations irked him, and he made others more satisfactory to himself; tools adjusted to an insect's frail body, not to a time-lock. Before that summer ended he could handle even the frailest and tiniest specimen with such nice care that it was delightful to watch him at work. The time was to come when he could mend a torn wing or fix a broken antennæ with such exquisite fidelity to detail that even the most expert eye might well be deceived.

I had only looked for a little temporary help, such as any intelligent amateur might be able to furnish. But I was not long unaware that this was more than a mere amateur. To quote himself, he had the goods, and I realized with a mounting heart that I had made a find, if I could only hold on to it. For the first time in years I could exchange specimens. My cabinets began to fill out—with such perfect insects, too! We added several rare ones, a circumstance to make any entomologist look upon the world through rosy spectacles. Why, even the scarce shy Cossus Centerensis came to our very doors, apparently to fill a space awaiting him. Perhaps he was a Buddhist insect undergoing reincarnation, and was anxious to acquire merit by self-immolation. Anyhow, we acquired him, and I hope he acquired merit.

We had scores of insects in the drying ovens. We had more and ever more in the breeding cages,—in our case

simple home-made affairs of a keg or a box with a fine wire-netting over the food plant; or a lamp-chimney slipped over a potted plant with a bit of mosquito-netting tied over the top, for the smaller forms.

These cages were a never-failing source of delight and interest to the children, and at their hands heaven rained caterpillars upon us that season. Even my mother grew interested in the work, though Clélie never ceased to look upon it as a horrid madness peculiar to white people.

"All Buckrahs is funny in dey haids," Daddy January consoled her when she complained to him about it. "Dey gets all kind o' fool notions 'bout all kind o' fool t'ings. You ain't got to feel so bad—de Jedge is lots wuss'n yo' boss is. Yo' boss kin see de bugs he run atter, but my boss talk 'bout some kind o' bug he call Germ. I ax um what kind o' bug is dat; an' he 'low you can't see um wid yo' eye. I ain't say so to de Jedge, but *I* 'low when you see bug you can't see wid yo' eye, you best not seem um 'tall—case he must be some kind o' spook, an' Gawd knows I ain't want to see no spook. Ef de bug ain't no spook, den he mus' be eenside yo' haid, 'stead o' outside um, an' to hab bug on de eenside o' yo' haid is de wuss kind o' bad luck. Anyhow, nobody but Buckrah talk an' ack like dat, niggers is got mo' sense."

We found, presently, a ready and a steady sale for our extra stock. We could supply caterpillars, butterflies and moths, or chrysalids and cocoons; we had some rather scarce ones; and then, our unmounted specimens were so perfect, and our mounted ones so exquisitely done, that we had but little trouble in disposing of them. Under the hand of John Flint these last were really

works of art. Not for nothing had he boasted that he was handy with his fingers.

The pretty common forms, framed hovering lifelike over delicately pressed ferns and flowers, found even a readier market, for they were really beautiful. Money had begun to come in—not largely, it is true, but still steadily and surely. You must know how to handle your stock, and you must be in touch with your market—scientists, students, collectors,—and this, of course, takes time. We could supply the larger dealers, too, although they pay less, and we had a modest advertisement in one or two papers published for the profession, which brought us orders. But let no one imagine that it is an easy task to handle these frail bodies, these gossamer wings, so that naturalists and collectors are glad to get them. Once or twice we lost valuable shipments.

Long since—in the late spring, to be exact, John Flint had moved out of the Guest Room, needed for other occupants, into a two-roomed outbuilding across the garden. Some former pastor had had it built for an oratory and retreat, but now, covered with vines, it had stood for many years unused, save as a sort of lumber room.

When the troublesome question of where we might properly house him had arisen, my mother hit upon these unused rooms as by direct inspiration. She had them cleaned, repainted, scoured, and turned into a pleasant well-lighted, airy workroom and living-room combined, and a smaller and rather austere bedroom, with an inexpensive but very good head of Christ over the mantel, and an old, old carved crucifix on the wall beside the white iron bed. Laurence took from his own room a Morris chair, whose somewhat frayed cushions my

mother neatly re-covered. Mary Virginia contributed a rug, as well as dressing-gown and slippers. Miss Sally Ruth gave him outright a brand-new Bible, and loaned him an old cedar-wood wardrobe which had been her great-grandmother's, and which still smelt delicately of generations of rose-leaved and lavendered linen.

"All I ask," said Miss Sally Ruth sharply, "is that you 'll read Paul with your eyes open and your mouth shut, and that you 'll keep your clothes in that wardrobe and your moths out of it. If it was intended for anybody to teach you anything, then Paul will teach you; but it *was n't* intended for a cedar-wood wardrobe to hold moths, and I hope you won't forget it!"

Major Cartwright sent over a fishing-rod, a large jar of tobacco, and a framed picture of General Lee.

"Because no man, suh, could live under the same roof with even his pictured semblance, and not be the bettah fo' it," said the major earnestly. "I know. I 've got to live with him myself. When I 'm fair to middlin' he 's in the dinin' room. When I 've skidded off the straight an' narrow path I lock him up in the parlor, an' at such times I sleep out on the po'ch. But when I 'm at peace with man an' God I take him into my bedroom an' look at him befo' retirin'. He 's about as easy to live with as the Angel Gabriel, but he 's mighty bracin', Marse Robert is: mighty bracin'!"

Thus equipped, John Flint settled himself in his own house. It had been a wise move, for he had the sense of proprietorship, privacy, and freedom. He could come and go as he pleased, with no one to question. He could work undisturbed, save for the children who brought him such things as they could find. He put his breeding

cages out on the vine-covered piazzas surrounding two sides of his house, arranged the cabinets and boxes which had been removed from my study to his own, nailed up a few shelves to suit himself, and set up housekeeping.

My mother had been frankly delighted to have my creeping friends moved out of the Parish House, and Clélie abated in her dislike of the one-legged man because he had, in a way, removed from her a heretofore never-absent fear of waking up some night and finding a caterpillar under her bed. More yet, he entailed no extra work, for he flatly refused to have her set foot in his rooms for the purpose of cleaning them. He attended to that himself. The man was a marvel of neatness and order. Mesdames, permit me to here remark that when a man is neat and orderly no woman of Eve's daughters can compare with him. John Flint's rooms would arouse the rabid envy of the cleanest and most scourful she in Holland itself.

Now as the months wore away there had sprung up between him, and Mary Virginia and Laurence, one of those odd comradely friendships which sometime unite the totally unlike with bonds hard to break. His spotless workroom had a fascination for the youngsters. They were always in and out, now with a cocoon, now an imago, now a larva, and then again to see how those they had already brought were getting along.

The lame man was an unrivaled listener—a circumstance which endeared him to youthful Laurence, in whom thoughts and the urge to express these thoughts in words rose like sap. This fresh and untainted confidence, poured out so naïvely, taught John Flint more than any words or prayers of mine could have done. It

opened to him a world into which his eyes had not heretofore been permitted to look; and the result was all the more sure and certain, in that the children had no faintest idea of the effect they were producing. They had no end to gain, no ax to grind; they merely spoke the truth as they knew it, and this unselfish and hopeful truthfulness aroused his interest and curiosity; it even compelled his admiration. He could n't dismiss *this* as "hot air"!

I was more than glad to have him thus taught. It was a salutary lesson, tending to temper his overweening confidence and to humble his contemptuous pride. In his own world he had been supreme, a figure of sinister importance. Brash had been crook or cop who had taught or caught Slippy McGee! But in this new atmosphere, in which he breathed with difficulty, the young had been given him for guides. They led him, where a grownup had failed.

Mary Virginia was particularly fond of him. He had as little to say to her as to Laurence, but he looked at her with interested eyes that never lost a movement; she knew he never missed a word, either; his silence was friendly, and the little girl had a pleasant fashion of taking folk for granted. Hers was one of those large natures which give lavishly, shares itself freely, but does not demand much in return. She gave with an open hand to her quiet listener—her books, her music, her amusing and innocent views, her frank comments, her truthfulness, her sweet brave gaiety; and he absorbed it like a sponge. It delighted her to find and bring the proper food-plants for his cages. And she being one of those who sing while they work, you might hear her

caroling like a lark, flitting about the old garden with her red setter Kerry at her heels.

Laurence no longer read aloud to him, but instead gave Flint such books as he could find covering his particular study, and these were devoured and pored over, and more begged for. Flint would go without new clothes, neat as he was, and without tobacco, much as he liked to smoke,—to buy books upon lepidoptera.

He helped my mother with her flowers and her vegetables, but refused to have anything to do with her chickens, remarking shortly that hens were such fools he could n't help hating them. Madame said she liked to have him around, for he was more like some unobtrusive jinnee than a mere mortal. She declared that John Flint had what the negroes call a "growing hand" —he had only to stick a bit of green in the ground and it grew like Jonah's gourd.

Since he had begun to hobble about, he had gradually come to be accepted by the town in general. They looked upon him as one who shared Father De Rancé's madness, a tramp who was a hunter of bugs. It explained his presence in the Parish House; I fancy it also explained to some why he had been a tramp!

Folks got used to him, as one does to anything one sees daily. The pleasant conservative soft-voiced ladies who liked to call on Madame of an afternoon and gossip Christianly, and drink tea and eat Clélie's little cakes on our broad shady verandah, only glanced casually at the bent head and shoulders visible through the screened window across the garden. They said he was very interesting, of course, but painfully shy and bashful. As for him, he was as horribly afraid of them as they would

have been of him, had they known. I could not always save myself from the sin of smiling at an ironic situation.

Judge Mayne had at first eyed the man askance, watching him as his own cats might an interloping stray dog.

"The fellow 's not very prepossessing," he told me, of an evening when he had dined with us, "but I 've been on the bench long enough to be skeptical of any fixed good or bad type—I 've found that the criminal type is any type that goes wrong; so I should n't go so far as to call this chap a bad egg. But—I hope you are reasonably sure of him, father?"

"Reasonably," said I, composedly.

"Laurence tells me Madame and Mary Virginia *like* the fellow. H'm! Well, I 've acquired a little faith in the intuition of women—some women, understand, and some times. And mark you, I did n't say *judgment.* Let us hope that this is one of the times when faith in intuition will be justified."

Later, when he had had time to examine the work progressing under the flexible fingers of the silent workman, he withdrew with more respect.

"I suppose he 's all right, if you think so, father. But I 'd watch out for him, anyway," he advised.

"That is exactly what I intend to do."

"Rather he fell into your hands than mine. Better for him," said the judge, briefly. Then he launched into an intimate talk of Laurence, and in thus talking of the boy's future, forgot my helper.

That was it, exactly. The man was so unobtrusive without in the least being furtive. Had so little to say; attended so strictly to his own business, and showed himself so utterly and almost inhumanly uninterested in

anybody else's, that he kept in the background. He was there, and people knew it; they were, in a sense, interested in him, but not curious about him.

One morning in early autumn—he had been with us then some eight or nine months—I went over to his rooms with a New York newspaper in my hand. It had news that set my heart to pounding sickeningly—news that at once simplified and yet complicated matters. I hesitated as to whether or not I should tell him, but decided that whatever effect that news might produce, I would deal with him openly, above board, and always with truth. He must act and judge for himself and with his eyes open. On my part there should be no concealment.

The paper stated that the body of a man found floating in the East River had been positively identified by the police as that of Slippy McGee. That the noted crook had gotten back into New York through the cunning dragnet so carefully spread for him was another proof of his daring and dexterity. How he met the dark fate which set him adrift, battered and dreadful, in the East River, was another of those underworld crimes that remain unsolved. Cunning and dangerous, mysterious in his life, baffling all efforts to get at him, he was as evilly mysterious in his death. There was only one thing sure—that this dead wretch with the marks of violence upon him was Slippy McGee; and since his breath had ceased, the authorities could breathe easier.

He read it deliberately; then re-read it, and sat and stared at the paper. A slow grim smile came to his lips, and he took his chin in his hand, musingly. The eyes narrowed, the face darkened, the jaw thrust itself forward.

"Dead, huh?" he grunted, and stared about him, with a slow, twisting movement of the head. "Well—I might just as well be, as buried alive in a jay-dump at the tail-end of all creation!" Once again the Powers of Darkness swooped down and wrestled with and for him; and knowing what I knew, sick at heart, I trembled for him.

"What am *I* doing here, anyhow?" he snarled with his lips drawn back from his teeth. "Piddling with bugs—*Me!* Patching up their dinky little wings and stretching out their dam' little legs and feelers—me being what I am, and they being what they are! Say, I 've got to quit this, once for all I 've got to quit it. I 'm not a *man* any more. I 'm a dead one, a he-granny cutting silo for lady-worms and drynursing their interesting little babies. My God! *Me!*" And he threw his hands above his head with a gesture of rage and despair.

"Hanging on here like a boob—no wonder they think I 'm dead! If I could just make a getaway and pull off one more good job and land enough—"

"You could n't keep it, if you did land it—your sort can't. You know how it went before—the women and the sharks got it. There 'd be always that same incentive to pull off just one more to keep you going—until you 'd pulled yourself behind bars, and stayed there. And there 's the drug-danger, too. If you escaped so far, it was because so far you had the strength to let drugs alone. But the drugs get you, sooner or later, do they not? Have you not told me over and over again that 'nearly all dips are dopes'? That first the dope gets you—and then the law? No. You can't pull off anything that won't pull you into hell. We have gone over this thing often enough, have n't we?"

"No, we have n't. And I have n't had a chance to pull off anything—except leaves for bugs. *Me!* I want to get my hand in once more, I tell you! I want to pull off a stunt that 'll make the whole bunch of bulls sit up and bellow for fair—and I can do it, easy as easy. Think I 've croaked, do they? And they can all snooze on their peg-posts, now I 'm a stiff? Well, by cripes, I just want half of a half of a chance, and I 'll show 'em Slippy McGee 's good and plenty alive!"

"Come out into the garden, my son, and feel that you are good and plenty alive. Come out into the free air. Hold on tight, a little while longer!"

I laid my hand upon his shoulder compellingly, and although he glared at me, and ground his teeth, and lifted his lip, he came; unwillingly, swearing under his breath, he came. We tramped up and down the garden paths, up and down, and back again, his wooden peg making a round hole, like a hoofmark, in the earth. He stared down at it, spat savagely upon it, and swore horribly, but not too loudly.

"I want to feel like a live man!" he gritted. "A live man, not a one-legged mucker with a beard like a Dutch bomb-thrower's, puttering about a skypilot's backyard on the wrong side of everything!"

"Stick it out a little longer, John Flint; hold fast!"

"Hold fast to what?" he demanded savagely. "To a bug stuck on a needle?"

"Yes. And to me who trusts you. To Madame who likes you. To the dear child who put bug and needle into your hand because she knew it was good work and trusted your hand to do it. And more than all, to that

other Me you 're finding—your own true self, John Flint! Hold fast, hold fast!"

He stopped and stared at me.

"I 'm believing him again!" said he, grievously. "I 've been sat on while I was hot, and my number 's marked on me, 23. I 'm hoodooed, that 's what!"

Tramp, tramp, stump, stump, up and down, the two of us.

"All right, devil-dodger," said he wearily, after a long sullen silence. "I 'll stick it out a bit longer, to please you. You 've been white—the lot of you. But look here—if I beat it some night . . . with what I can find, why, I 'm warning you: don't blame *me*—you 're running your risks, and it 'll be up to *you* to explain!"

"When you want to go, John Flint—when you really and truly want to go, why, take anything I have that you may fancy, my son. I give it you beforehand."

"I don't want anything given to me beforehand!" he growled. "I want to take what I want to take without anybody's leave!"

"Very well, then; take what you want to take, without anybody's leave! I shall be able to do without it, I dare say."

He turned upon me furiously:

"Oh, yes, I guess you can! You 'd do without eating and breathing too, I suppose, if you could manage it! You do without too blamed much right now, trying to beat yourself to being a saint! Of course I 'd help myself and leave you to go without—you 're enough to make a man ache to shoot some sense into you with a cannon! And for God's sake, *who* are you pinching and

scraping and going without *for?* A bunch of hickey factory-shuckers that have n't got sense enough to talk American, and a lot of mill-hands with beans on 'em like bone buttons! They ain't worth it. While I 'm in the humor, take it from me there ain't anybody worth anything anyhow!"

"Oh, Mr. Flint! What a shame and a sin!" called another voice. "Oh, Mr. Flint, I 'm ashamed of you!" There in the freedom of the Saturday morning sunlight stood Mary Virginia, her red Irish setter Kerry beside her.

"I came over," said she, "to see how the baby-moths are getting on this morning, and to know if the last hairy gentleman I brought spins into a cocoon or buries himself in the ground. And then I heard Mr. Flint—and what he said is unkind, and untrue, and not a bit like him. Why, everybody 's worth everything you can do for them—only some are worth more."

The wild wrath died out of his face. As usual, he softened at sight of her.

"Oh, well, miss, I was n't thinking of the like of you —and him," he jerked his head at me, half apologetically, "nor young Mayne, nor the little Madame. You 're different."

"Why, no, we are n't, really," said Mary Virginia, puckering her brows adorably. "We only *seem* to be different—but we are just exactly like everybody else, only *we* know it, and some people never can seem to find it out—and there 's the difference! You see?" That was the befuddled manner in which Mary Virginia very often explained things. If God was good to you, you got a little glimmer of what she meant and was trying

to tell you. Mary Virginia often talked as the alchemists used to write—cryptically, abstrusely, as if to hide the golden truth from all but the initiate.

"Come and shake hands with Mr. Flint, Kerry," said she to the setter. "I want you to help make him understand things it 's high time he should know. Nobody can do that better than a good dog can."

Kerry looked a trifle doubtful, but having been told to do a certain thing, he obeyed, as a good dog does. Gravely he sat up and held out an obedient paw, which the man took mechanically. But meeting the clear hazel eyes, he dropped his hand upon the shining head with the gesture of one who desires to become friends. Accepting this, Kerry reached up a nose and nuzzled. Then he wagged his plumy tail.

"There!" said Mary Virginia, delightedly. "Now, don't you see how horrid it was to talk the way you talked? Why, Kerry *likes* you, and Kerry is a sensible dog."

"Yes, miss," and he looked at Mary Virginia very much as the dog did, trustingly, but a little bewildered.

"Are n't you sorry you said that?"

"Y-e-s, seeing you seem to think it was wrong."

"Well, you 'll know better from now on," said Mary Virginia, comfortingly. She looked at him searchingly for a minute, and he met her look without flinching. That had been the one hopeful sign, from the first—that he never refused to meet your glance, but gave you back one just as steady, if more suspicious.

"Mr. Flint," said Mary Virginia, "you 've about made up your mind to stay on here with the Padre, have n't you? For a good long while, at any rate?

You would n't like to leave the Padre, would you?"

He stiffened. One could see the struggle within him.

"Well, miss, I can't see but that I 've just got to stay on—for awhile. Until he 's tired of me and my ways, anyhow," he said gloomily.

Mary Virginia dismissed my tiredness with an airy wave of her hand. She smiled.

"Do you know," said she earnestly, "I 've had the funniest idea about you, from the very first time I saw you? Well, I have. I 've somehow got the notion that you and the Padre *belong.* I think that 's why you came. I think you belong right here, in that darling little house, studying butterflies and mounting them so beautifully they look alive. I think you 're never going to go away anywhere any more, but that you 're going to stay right here as long as you live!"

His face turned an ugly white, and his mouth fell open. He looked at Mary Virginia almost with horror—Saul might have looked thus at the Witch of Endor when she summoned the shade of Samuel to tell him that the kingdom had been rent from his hand and his fate was upon him.

Mary Virginia nodded, thoughtfully.

"I feel so sure of it," said she, confidently, "that I 'm going to ask you to do me a favor. I want you to take care of Kerry for me. You know I 'm going away to school next week, and—he can't stay at home when I 'm not there. My father 's away frequently, and he could n't take Kerry about with him, of course. And he could n't be left with the servants—somehow he does n't like the colored people. He always growls at them, and they 're afraid of him. And my mother dis-

likes dogs intensely—she 's afraid of them, except those horrible little toy-things that are n't *dogs* any more." The scorn of the real dog-lover was in her voice. "Kerry 's used to the Parish House. He loves the Padre, he 'll soon love you, and he likes to play with Pitache, so Madame would n't mind his being here. And —I 'd be more satisfied in my mind if he were with somebody that—that needed him—and would like him a whole lot—somebody like you," she finished.

Now, Mary Virginia regarded Kerry even as the apple of her eye. The dog was a noble and beautiful specimen of his race, thoroughbred to the bone, a fine field dog, and the pride of the child's heart. He was what only that most delightful of dogs, a thoroughbred Irish setter, can be. John Flint gasped. Something perplexed, incredulous, painful, dazzled, crept into his face and looked out of his eyes.

"*Me?*" he gasped. "You mean you 're willing to let me keep your dog for you? Yours?"

"I want to *give* him to you," said Mary Virginia bravely enough, though her voice trembled. "I am perfectly sure you 'll love him—better than any one else in the world would, except me myself. I don't know why I know that, but I do know it. If you wanted to go away, later on, why, you could turn him over to the Padre, because of course you would n't want to have a dog following you about everywhere. They 're a lot of bother. But—somehow, I think you 'll keep him. I think you 'll love him. He—he 's a darling dog." She was too proud to turn her head aside, but two large tears rolled down her cheeks, like dew upon a rose.

John Flint stood stock-still, looking from her to the

dog, and back again. Kerry, sensing that something was wrong with his little mistress, pawed her skirts and whined.

"Now I come to think of it," said John Flint slowly, "I never had anything—anything alive, I mean—belong to me before."

Mary Virginia glanced up at him shrewdly, and smiled through her tears. Her smile makes a funny delicious red V of her lower lip, and is altogether adorable and seductive.

"That 's just exactly why you thought nobody was worth anything," she said. Then she bent over her dog and kissed him between his beautiful hazel eyes.

"Kerry, dear," said she, "Kerry, dear Kerry, you don't belong to me any more. I—I 've got to go away to school—and you know you would n't be happy at home without me. You belong to Mr. Flint now, and I 'm sure he needs you, and I know he 'll love you almost as much as I do, and he 'll be very, very good to you. So you 're to stay with him, and—stand by him and be his dog, like you were mine. You 'll remember, Kerry? Good-by, my dear, dear, darling dog!" She kissed him again, patted him, and thrust his collar into his new owner's hand.

"Go—good-by, everybody!" said she, in a muffled voice, and ran. I think she would have cried childishly in another moment; and she was trying hard to remember that she was growing up!

John Flint stood staring after her, his hand on the dog's collar, holding him in. His face was still without a vestige of color, and his eyes glittered. Then his other hand crept out to touch the dog's head.

"It 's wet—where she dropped tears on it! Parson . . . she 's given me her dog . . . that she loves enough to cry over!"

"He 's a very fine dog, and she has had him and loved him from his puppyhood," I reminded him. And I added, with a wily tongue: "You can always turn him over to me, you know—if you decide to take to the road and wish to get rid of a troublesome companion. A dog is bad company for a man who wishes to dodge the police."

But he only shook his head. His eyes were troubled, and his forehead wrinkled.

"Parson," said he, hesitatingly, "did you ever feel like you 'd been caught by—by Something reaching down out of the dark? Something big that you could n't see and could n't ever hope to get away from, because it 's always on the job? Ain't it a hell of a feeling?"

"Yes," I agreed. "I 've felt—caught by that Something, too. And it is at first a terrifying sensation. Until—you learn to be glad."

"You 're caught—and you know under your hat you 're never going to be able to get away any more. It 'll hold you till you die!" said he, a little wildly. "My God! I 'm caught! First It bit off a leg on me, so I could n't run. Then It wished you and your bugs on me. And now— Yes, sir; I 'm done for. That kid got my goat this morning. My God, who 'd believe it? But it 's true: I 'm done for. She gave me her dog and she got my goat!"

CHAPTER VI

"THY SERVANT WILL GO AND FIGHT WITH THIS PHILISTINE"

1 Sam. 17: 32.

MARY VIRGINIA had gone, weeping and bewept, and the spirit of youth seemed to have gone with her, leaving the Parish House darkened because of its absence. A sorrowful quiet brooded over the garden that no longer echoed a caroling voice. Kerry, seeking vainly for the little mistress, would come whining back to John Flint, and look up mutely into his face; and finding no promise there, lie down, whimpering, at his feet. The man seemed as desolate as the dog, because of the child's departure.

"When I come back," Mary Virginia said to him at parting, "I expect you 'll know more about moths and butterflies than anybody else in the world does. You 're that sort. I 'd love to be here, watching you grow up into it, but I 've got to go away and grow up into something myself. I 'm very glad you came here, Mr. Flint. You 've helped me, lots."

"Me?" with husky astonishment.

"You, of course," said the child, serenely. "Because you are such a good man, Mr. Flint, and so patient, and you stick at what you try to do until you do it better than anybody else does. Often and often when I 've been trying to do sums—I 'm frightfully stupid about arith-

metic—and I wanted to give up, I 'd think of you over here just trying and trying and keeping right on trying, until you 'd gotten what you wanted to know; and then *I 'd* keep on trying, too. The funny part is, that I like you for making me do it. You see, I 'm a very, very bad person in some things, Mr. Flint," she said frankly. "Why, when my mother has to tell me to look at so and so, and see how well they behave, or how nicely they can do certain things, and how good they are, and why don't I profit by such a good example, a perfectly horrid raging sort of feeling comes all over me, and I want to be as naughty as naughty! I feel like doing and saying things I 'd never want to do or say, if it was n't for that good example. I just can't seem to *bear* being good-exampled. But you 're different, thank goodness. Most really good people are different, I guess."

He looked at her, dumbly—he had no words at his command. She missed the irony and the tragedy, but she sensed the depths of feeling under that mute exterior.

"I 'm glad you 're sorry I 'm going away," said she, with the directness that was so engaging. "I perfectly love people to feel sorry to part with me. I hope and *hope* they 'll keep on being sorry—because they 'll be that much gladder when I come back. I don't believe there 's anything quite so wonderful and beautiful as having other folks like you, except it 's liking other folks yourself!"

"I never had to be bothered about it, either way," said he dryly. His face twitched.

"Maybe that 's because you never stayed still long enough in any one place to catch hold," said she, and laughed at him.

"Good-by, Mr. Flint! I 'll never see a butterfly or a moth, the whole time I 'm gone, without making believe he 's a messenger from Madame, and the Padre, and you, and Kerry. I 'll play he 's a carrier-butterfly, with a message tucked away under his wings: 'Howdy, Mary Virginia! I 've just come from flying over the flowers in the Parish House garden; and the folks are all well, and busy, and happy. But they have n't forgotten you for a single solitary minute, and they miss you and wish you 'd come back; and they send you their dear, dear love—and I 'll carry your dear, dear love back to them!' So if you see a big, big, beautiful, strange fellow come sailing by your window some morning, why, that 's mine, Mr. Flint! Remember!"

And then she was gone, and he had his first taste of unselfish human sorrow. Heretofore his worries had been purely personal and self-centered: this was different, and innocent. It shocked and terrified him to find out how intensely he could miss another being, and that being a mere child. He was n't used to that sort of pain, and it bewildered him.

Eustis himself had wanted the little girl sent to a preparatory school which would fit her for one of the women's colleges. He had visions of the forward sweep of women—visions which his wife did n't share. Her daughter should go to the Church School at which she herself had been educated, an exclusive and expensive institution where the daughters of the wealthy were given a finishing hand-polish with ecclesiastical emery, as a sort of social hall-mark. Mrs. Eustis had a horror of what she called, in quotation-marks, the modern non-religious method of educating young ladies.

The Eustis house was closed, and left in charge of the negro caretakers, for Mrs. Eustis could n't stand the loneliness of the place after the child's departure, and Eustis himself found his presence more and more necessary at the great plantation he was building up. Mrs. Eustis left Appleboro, and my mother missed her. There was a vein of pure gold underlying the placid little woman's character, which the stronger woman divined and built upon.

Laurence, too, entered college that Fall. I had coached him, in such hours as I could spare. He was conscientious enough, though his Greek was not the Greek of Homer and he vexed the soul of my mother with a French she said was spoke

> full fair and fetisly
> After ye schole of Strattford atte Bowe.

But if he had n't Mary Virginia's sensitiveness to all beauty, nor her playful fancy and vivid imagination, he was clear-brained and clean-thinking, with that large perspective and that practical optimism which seem to me so essentially American. He saw without confusion both the thing as it was and as it could become. With only enough humor to save him, he had a sternness more of the puritan than of the cavalier blood from which he had sprung. Above all was he informed with that new spirit brooding upon the face of all the waters, a spirit that for want of a better name one might call the Race Conscience.

It was this last aspect of the boy's character that amazed and interested John Flint, who was himself too shrewd not to divine the sincerity, even the common-

sense, of what Laurence called "applied Christianity." Altruism—and Slippy McGee! He listened with a puzzled wonder.

"I wish," he grumbled to Laurence, "that you 'd come off the roof. It gives a fellow stiff neck rubbering up at you!"

"I 'd rather stay up—the air 's better, and you can see so much farther," said Laurence. And he added hospitably: "There 's plenty of room—come on up, yourself!"

"With one leg?" sarcastically.

"And two eyes," said the boy. "Come on up—the sky 's fine!" And he laughed into the half-suspicious face.

The gimlet eyes bored into him, and the frank and truthful eyes met them unabashed, unwavering, with a something in them which made the other blink.

"When I got pitched into this burg," said the lame man thoughtfully, "I landed all there—except a leg, but I never carried my brains in my legs. I had n't got any bats in my belfry. But I 'm getting 'em. I 'm getting 'em so bad that when I hear some folks talk bughouse these days it pretty near listens like good sense to me. Why, kid, I 'm nut enough now to dangle over the edge of believing you know what you 're talking about!"

"Fall over: I *know* I know what I 'm talking about," said Laurence magnificently.

"I 'm double-crossed," said John Flint, soberly and sadly, "Anyway I look at it—" he swept the horizon with a wide-flung gesture, "it 's bugs for mine. I began by grannying bugs for *him*," he tossed his head bull-

like in my direction, "and I stand around swallowing hot air from *you*—" He glared at Laurence, "and what 's the result? Why, that I 've got bugs in the bean, that 's what! Think of *me* licking an all-day sucker a kid dopes out! *Me!* Oh, he—venly saints!" he gulped. "Ain't I the nut, though?"

"Well, supposing?" said Laurence, laughing. "Buck up! You *could* be a bad egg instead of a good nut, you know!"

John Flint's eyes slitted, then widened; his mouth followed suit almost automatically. He looked at me.

"Can you beat it?" he wondered.

"Beating a bad egg would be a waste of time I would n't be guilty of," said I amusedly. "But I hope to live to see the good nut grow into a fine tree."

"Do your damnedest—excuse me, parson!" said he contritely. "I mean, don't stop for a little thing like *me!*"

Laurence leaned forward. "Man," said he, impressively, "he won't have to! You 'll be marking time and keeping step with him yourself before you know it!"

"Huh!" said John Flint, non-committally.

Laurence came to spend his last evening at home with us.

"Padre," said he, when we walked up and down in the garden, after an old custom, after dinner, "do you really know what I mean to do when I 've finished college and start out on my own hook?"

"Put 'Mayne & Son' on the judge's shingle and walk

around the block forty times a day to look at it!" said I, promptly.

"Of course," said he. "That first. But a legal shingle can be turned into as handy a weapon as one could wish for, Padre, and *I 'm* going to take that shingle and spank this sleepy-headed old town wide awake with it!" He spoke with the conviction of youth, so sure of itself that there is no room for doubt. There was in him, too, a hint of latent power which was impressive. One did not laugh at Laurence.

"It 's my town," with his chin out. "It could be a mighty good town. It 's going to become one. I expect to live all my life right here, among my own people, and they 've got to make it worth my while. I don't propose to cut myself down to fit any little hole: I intend to make that hole big enough to fit my possible measure."

"May an old friend wish more power to your shovel?"

"It 'll be a steam shovel!" said he, gaily. Then his face clouded.

"Padre! I 'm sick of the way things are run in Appleboro! I 've talked with other boys and they 're sick of it, too. You know why they want to get away? Because they think they have n't got even a fighting chance here. Because towns like this are like billion-ton old wagons sunk so deep in mudruts that nothing but dynamite can blow them out—and they are not dealers in dynamite. If they want to do anything that even *looks* new they 've got to fight the stand-patters to a finish, and they 're blockaded by a lot of reactionaries that don't know the earth 's moving. There are a lot of folks in the South, Padre, who 've

been dead since the civil war, and have n't found it out themselves, and won't take live people's word for it. Well, now, I mean to *do* things. I mean to do them right here. And I certainly shan't allow myself to be blockaded by anybody, living or dead. You 've got to fight the devil with fire;—I 'm going to blockade those blockaders, and see that the dead ones are decently buried."

"You have tackled a big job, my son."

"I like big jobs, Padre. They 're worth while. Maybe I 'll be able to keep some of the boys home—the town needs them. Maybe I can keep some of those poor kids out of the mills, too. Oh, yes, I expect a right lively time!"

I was silent. I knew how supinely Appleboro lay in the hollow of a hard hand. I had learned, too, how such a hand can close into a strangling fist.

"Of course I can't clean up the whole state, and I can't reorganize the world," said the boy sturdily. "I 'm not such a fool as to try. But I can do my level best to disinfect my own particular corner, and make it fit for men and safe for women and kids to live and breathe in. Padre, for years there has n't been a rotten deal nor a brazen steal in this state that the man who practically owns and runs this town had n't a finger in, knuckle-deep. *He 's got to go.*"

"Goliath does n't always fall at the hand of the son of Jesse, my little David," said I quietly. I also had dreamed dreams and seen visions.

"That 's about what my father says," said the boy. "He wants me to be a successful man, a 'safe and sane citizen.' He thinks a gentleman should practise his pro-

fession decently and in order. But to believe, as I do, that you can wipe out corruption, that you can tackle poverty the same as you would any other disease, and prevent it, as smallpox and yellow fever are prevented, he looks upon as madness and a waste of time."

"He has had sorrow and experience, and he is kind and charitable, as well as wise," said I.

"That 's exactly where the hardest part comes in for us younger fellows. It is n't bucking the bad that makes the fight so hard: it 's bucking the wrong-idea'd good. Padre, one good man on the wrong side is a stumbling-block for the stoutest-hearted reformer ever born. It 's men like my father, who regard the smooth scoundrel that runs this town as a necessary evil, and tolerate him because they would n't soil their hands dealing with him, that do the greatest injury to the state. I tell you what, it would n't be so hard to get rid of the devil, if it were n't for the angels!"

"And how," said I, ironically, "do you propose to set about smoothing the rough and making straight the crooked, my son?"

"Flatten 'em out," said he, briefly. "Politics. First off I 'm going to practice general law; then I 'll be solicitor-general for this county. After that, I shall be attorney-general for the state. Later I may be governor, unless I become senator instead."

"Well," said I, cautiously, "you 'll be so toned down by that time that you might make a very good governor indeed."

"I could n't very well make a worse one than some we 've already had," said the boy sternly. There was something of the accusing dignity of a young archangel

about him. I caught a glimpse of that newer America growing up about us—an America gone back to the older, truer, unbuyable ideals of our fathers.

"I guess you 'd better tell me good-by now, Padre," said he, presently. "And bless me, please—it 's a pretty custom. I won't see you again, for you 'll be saying mass when I 'm running for my train. I 'll go tell John Flint good-by, too."

He went over and rapped on the window, through which we could see Flint sitting at his table, his head bent over a book.

"Good-by, John Flint" said Laurence. "Good luck to you and your leggy friends! When I come back you 'll probably have mandibles, and you 'll greet me with a nip, in pure Bugese."

"Good-by," said John Flint, lifting his head. Then, with unwonted feeling: "I 'm horrible sorry you 've got to go—I 'll miss you something fierce. You 've been very kind—thank you."

"Mind you take care of the Padre," said the boy, waiving the thanks with a smile. "Don't let him work too hard."

"Who, me?" Flint's voice took the knife-edge of sarcasm. "Oh, sure! It don't need but one leg to keep up with a gent trying to run a thirty-six hour a day job with one-man power, does it? Son, take it from me, when a man 's got the real, simonpure, no-imitation, soulsaving bug in his bean, a forty-legged cyclone could n't keep up with him, much less a guy with one pedal short." He glared at me indignantly. From the first it has been one of his vainest notions that I am perversely working myself to death.

"There 's nothing to be done with the Padre, then, I 'm afraid," said Laurence, chuckling.

"I *might* soak him in the cyanide jar for ten minutes a day without killing him," mused Mr. Flint. "But," disgustedly, "what 'd be the use? When he came to and found he 'd been that long idle he 'd die of heart-failure." He pushed aside the window screen, and the two shook hands heartily. Then the boy, wringing my hand again, walked away without another word. I felt a bit desolate—there are times when I could envy women their solace of tears—as if he figured in his handsome young person that newer, stronger, more conquering generation which was marching ahead, leaving me, older and slower and sadder, far, far behind it. Ah! To be once more that young, that strong, that hopeful!

When I began to reflect upon what seemed visionary plans, I was saddened, foreseeing inevitable disillusion, perhaps even stark failure, ahead of him. That he would stubbornly try to carry out those plans I did not doubt: I knew my Laurence. He might accomplish a certain amount of good. But to overthrow Inglesby, the Boss of Appleboro—for he meant no less than this—why, that was a horse of another color!

For Inglesby was our one great financial figure. He owned our bank; his was the controlling interest in the mills; he owned the factory outright; he was president of half a dozen corporations and chairman and director of many more.

Did we have a celebration? There he was, in the center of the stage, with a jovial loud laugh and an ultra-benevolent smile to hide the menace of his little cold piglike eyes, and the meaning of his heavy jaw.

Will the statement that he had a pew in every church in town explain him? He had one in mine, too; paid for, which many of them are not.

At the large bare office in the mill he was easy of access, and would listen to what you had to say with flattering attention and sympathy. But it was in his private office over the bank that this large spider really spun the web of our politics. Mills, banks, churches, schools, lights, railroads, stores, heating, water-power—all these juicy flies apparently walked into his parlor of their own accord. He had made and unmade governors; he had sent his men to Washington. How? We suspected; but held our peace. If our Bible had bidden us Americans to suffer rascals gladly—instead of mere fools—we could n't be more obedient to a mandate.

Men like James Eustis and Judge Mayne despised Inglesby—but gave him a wide berth. They would n't be enmeshed. It was known that Major Appleby Cartwright had blackballed him.

"I can stand a man, suh, that likes to get along in this world—within proper bounds. But Inglesby has n't got any proper bounds. He 's a—a cross between a Republican mule and a party-bolting boa-constrictor, an' a hybrid like that has n't got any place in nature. On top of that he drinks ten cents a bottle grape juice and smokes five cent cigars. And he 's got the brazen and offensive effrontery to offer 'em to self-respectin' men!"

And here was Laurence, our little Laurence, training himself to overthrow this overgrown Goliath! Well, if the boy could not bring this Philistine to the earth, he might yet manage to give him a few manful clumps on

the head; perhaps enough to insure a chronic headache.

So thinking, I went in and watched John Flint finish a mounting-block from a plan in the book open upon the table, adding, however, certain improvements of his own.

He laid the block aside and then took a spray of fresh leaves and fed it to a horned and hungry caterpillar prowling on a bit of bare stem at the bottom of his cage.

"Get up there on those leaves, you horn-tailed horror! Move on,—you lepidopterous son of a wigglejoint, or I 'll pull your real name on you in a minute and paralyze you stiff!" He drew a long breath. "You know how I 'm beginning to remember their real names? I swear 'em half an hour a day. Next time you have trouble with those hickeys of yours, try swearing caterpillar at 'em, and you 'll find out."

I laughed, and he grinned with me.

"Say," said he, abruptly. "I 've been listening with both my ears to what that boy was talking to you about awhile ago. Thinks he can buck the Boss, does he?"

"Perhaps he may," I admitted.

"Nifty old bird, the Big Un," said Mr. Flint, squinting his eyes. "And," he went on, reflectively, "he 's sure got your number in this burg. Take you by and large, you lawabiders are a real funny sort, ain't you? Now, there 's Inglesby, handing out the little kids their diplomas come school-closing, and telling 'em to be real good, and maybe when they grow up he 'll have a job in pickle for 'em—work like a mule in a treadmill, twelve hours, no unions, *and* the coroner to sit on the remains, free and gratis, for to ease the widow's mind.

Inglesby 's got seats in all your churches—first-aid to the parson's pants-pockets.

"Inglesby 's right there on the platform at all your spiel-fests, smirking at the women and telling 'em not to bother their nice little noddles about anything but holding down their natural jobs of being perfect ladies —ain't he and other gents just like him always right there holding down *their* natural jobs of protecting 'em and being influenced to do what 's right? Sure he is! And nobody howls for the hook! You let him be It—him with a fist in the state's jeans up to the armpit!

"Look here, that Mayne kid 's dead right. It 's you good guys that are to blame. We little bad ones see you kowtowing to the big worse ones, and we get to thinking *we* can come in under the wires easy winners, too. However, let me tell you something while I 'm in the humor to gas. It 's this: *sooner or later everybody gets theirs.* My sort and Inglesby's sort, we all get ours. Duck and twist and turn and sidestep all we want, at the end it 's right there waiting for us, with a loaded billy up its sleeve: *Ours!* Some fine day when we 're looking the other way, thinking we 've even got it on the annual turnout of the cops up Broadway for class, why, Ours gets up easy on its hind legs, spits on its mitt, and hands us exactly what 's coming to us, biff! and we wake up sitting on our necks in the middle of day-before-yesterday and year-after-next. I got mine. If I was you I would n't be too cock-sure that kid don't give Inglesby his, some of these days, good and plenty."

"Maybe so," said I, cautiously.

"Gee, that 'd be fly-time for all the good guys in this tank, would n't it?" he grinned. "Sure! I can see

'em now, patting the bump on their beans where they think the brain-patch sprouts, and handing out hunks of con to the Lord about his being right on his old-time job of swatting sinners in their dinners. Yet they 'll all of them go right on leading themselves up to be trimmed by the very next holdup that 's got the nerve to do them! Friend, believe a goat when he tells you that you stillwater-and-greenpasture sheep are some bag of nuts!"

"Thank you," said I, with due meekness.

"Keep the change," said he, unabashed. "I was n't meaning *you,* anyhow. I 've got more manners, I hope, than to do such. And, parson, you don't need to have cold feet about young Mayne. If you ask me, *I 'd* bet the limit on him. Why, I think so much of that boy that if he was a rooster I 'd put the gaffs and my last dollar on him, and back him to whip everything in feathers clean up to baldheaded eagles. Believe me, he 'd do it!" he finished, with enthusiasm.

Bewildered by a mental picture of a Laurence with ruffled neck-feathers and steel spurs, I hurriedly changed the subject to the saner and safer one of our own immediate affairs.

"Yep, ten orders in to-day's mail and seven in yesterday's; and good orders for the wasp-moths, single or together, and that house in New York wants steady supplies from now on. And here 's a fancy shop wants a dozen trays, like that last one I finished. We 're looking up," said he, complacently.

The winter that followed was a trying one, and the Guest Rooms were never empty. I like to record that

John Flint put his shoulder to the wheel and became Madame's right hand man and Westmoreland's faithful ally. His wooden leg made astonishingly little noise, and his entrance into a room never startled the most nervous patient. He went on innumerable errands, and he performed countless small services that in themselves do not seem to amount to much, but swell into a great total.

"He may have only one leg," said Westmoreland, when Flint had helped him all of one night with a desperately ill millworker, "but he certainly has two hands; he knows how to use his ears and eyes, he 's dumb until he ought to speak, and then he speaks to the point. Father, Something knew what It was about when you and I were allowed to drag that tramp out of the teeth of death! Yes, yes, I 'm certainly glad and grateful we were allowed to save John Flint."

From that time forth the big man gave his ex-patient a liking which grew with his years. Absent-minded as he was, he could thereafter always remember to find such things as he thought might interest him. Appleboro laughs yet about the day Dr. Westmoreland got some small butterflies for his friend, and having nowhere else to put them, clapped them under his hat, and then forgot all about them; until he lifted his hat to some ladies and the swarm of insects flew out.

Without being asked, and as unostentatiously as he did everything else, Flint had taken his place in church every Sunday.

"Because it 'd sort of give you a black eye if I did n't," he explained. "Skypiloting 's your lay, father, and I 'll see you through with it as far as I can.

I could n't fall down on any man that 's been as white to me as you 've been."

I must confess that his conception of religion was very, very hazy, and his notions of church services and customs barbarous. For instance, he disliked the statues of the saints exceedingly. They worried him.

"I can't seem to stand a man dolled-up in skirts," he confessed. "Any more than I 'd be stuck on a dame with whiskers. It don't somehow look right to me. Put the he-saints in pants instead of those brown kimonas with gold crocheting and a rope sash, and I 'd have more respect for 'em."

When I tried to give him some necessary instructions, and to penetrate the heathen darkness in which he seemed immersed, he listened with the utmost respect and attention—and wrinkled his brow painfully, and blinked, and licked his lips.

"That 's all right, father, that 's all right. If you say it 's so, I guess it 's so. I 'll take your word for it. If it 's good enough for you and Madame, there 's got to be something in it, and it 's sure good enough for me. Look here: the little girl and young Mayne have got a different brand from yours, have n't they?"

"Neither of them is of the Old Faith."

"Huh! Well, I tell you what you do: you just switch me in somewhere between you and Madame and him and her. That 'll give me a line on all of you—and maybe it 'll give all of you a line on me. See?"

I saw, but as through a glass darkly. So the matter rested. And I must in all humility set down that I have never yet been able to get at what John Flint really believes he believes.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOING OF SLIPPY MC GEE

LITTLE by little, so quietly as to be unnoticeable in the working, but with cumulative effect; built under the surface like those coral reefs that finally rear themselves into palm-crowned peaks upon the Pacific, during the years' slow upward march had John Flint grown.

Nature had never meant him for a criminal. The evil conditions that society saddles upon the slums had set him wrong because they gave him no opportunity to be right. Now even among butterflies there are occasional aberrants, but they are the rare exceptions. Give the grub his natural food, his chance to grow, protect him from parasites in the meanwhile, and he will presently become the normal butterfly. That is the Law.

At a crucial phase in this man's career his true talisman—a gray moth—had been put into his hand; and thereby he came into his rightful heritage.

I count as one of my red-letter days that on which I found him brooding over the little gray-brown chrysalis of the Papilio Cresphontes, that splendid swallowtail whose hideous caterpillar we in the South call the orange puppy, from the fancied resemblance the hump upon it bears to the head of a young dog. Its chrysalis looks so much like a bit of snapped-off twig that the casual eye

misses it, fastened to a stem by a girdle of silk or lying among fallen leaves.

"I watched it ooze out of an egg like a speck of dirty water. I watched it eat a thousand times its own weight and grow into the nastiest wretch that crawls. I saw it stop eating and spit its stomach out and shrivel up, and crawl out of its skin and pull its own head off, and bury itself alive in a coffin made out of itself, a coffin like a bit of rotting wood. Look at it! There it lies, stone-dead for all a man's eyes can see!

"And yet this thing will answer a call no ears can hear and crawl out of its coffin something entirely different from what went into it! I 've seen it with my own eyes, but how it 's done I don't know; no, nor no man since the world was made knows, or could do it himself. What does it? What gives that call these dead-alive things hear in the dark? What makes a crawling ugliness get itself ready for what 's coming—how does it *know* there 's ever going to be a call, or that it 'll hear it without fail?"

"Some of us call it Nature: but others call it God," said I.

"Search me! I don't know what It is—but I do know there 's got to be Something behind these things, anyhow," said he, and turned the chrysalis over and over in his palm, staring down at it thoughtfully. He had used Westmoreland's words, once applied to his own case! "Oh, yes, there 's Something, because I've watched It working with grubs, getting 'em ready for five-inch moths and hand-colored butterflies, Something that 's got the time and the patience and the know-how

to build wings as well as worlds." He laid the little inanimate mystery aside.

"It 's come to the point, parson, where I 've just *got* to know more. I know enough now to know how much I don't know, because I 've got a peep at how much there is to know. There 's a God's plenty to find out, and it 's up to me to go out and find it."

"Some of the best and brightest among men have given all the years of their lives to just that finding out and knowing more—and they found their years too few and short for the work. But such help as you need and we can get, you shall have, please God!" said I.

"I 'm ready for the word to start, chief." And heaven knows he was.

His passion transformed him; he forgot himself; took his mind off himself and his affairs and grievances and hatreds and fears; and thus had chance to expand and to grow, in those following years of patientest effort, of untiring research and observance, of lovingest study. Days in the open woods and fields burned his pale skin a good mahogany, and stamped upon it the windswept freshness of out of doors. The hunted and suspicious glance faded from his eyes, which took on more and more the student's absorbed intensity; the mouth lost its sinister straightness; and while it retained an uncompromising firmness, it learned how to smile. He was a familiar figure, tramping from dawn to dusk with Kerry at his heels, for the dog obeyed Mary Virginia's command literally. He looked upon John Flint as his special charge, and made himself his fourlegged red shadow. I am sure that if we had seen Kerry appear in

the streets of Appleboro without John Flint, we would have incontinently stopped work, sounded a general alarm, and gone to hunt for his body. And to have seen John Flint without Kerry would have called forth condolences.

Sometimes—when I had time—I went with him moth-hunting at night; and never, never could either of us forget those enchanted hours under the stars!

We moved in a quiet fresh and dewy, with the night wind upon us like a benediction. Sometimes we skirted a cypress swamp and saw the shallow black water with blacker trees reflected upon its bosom, and heard the frogs' canorous quarrelings, and the stealthy rustlings of creatures of the dark. We crossed dreaming fields, and smelt leaves and grasses and sleeping flowers. We saw the heart of the wood bared to the magic of the moon, which revealed a hidden and haunting beauty of places commonplace enough by day; as if the secret souls of things showed themselves only in the holy dark.

For the world into which we stepped for a space was not our world, but the fairy world of the Little People, the world of the Children of the Moon. And oh, the moths! Now it was a tiger, with his body banded with yellow and his white opaque delicate wings spotted with black; now the great green silken Luna with long curved tails bordered with lilac or gold, and vest of ermine; now some quivering Catocala, with afterwings spread to show orange and black and crimson; now the golden-brown Io, with one great black velvet spot; and now some rarer, shyer fellow over which we gloated.

How they flashed and fluttered about the lantern, or circled about the trees upon which the feast had been

spread! The big yellow-banded sphinx whirred hither and thither on his owl-like wings, his large eyes glowing like rubies, hung quivering above some flower for a moment, and then was off again as swift as thought. The light drew the great Regalis, all burnished tawny brown, striped and spotted with raw gold; and the Cynthia, banded with lilac, her heavy body tufted with white. The darkness in which they moved, the light which for a moment revealed them, seemed to make their colors *alive;* for they show no such glow and glory in the common day; they pale when the moon pales, and when the sun is up they are merely moths; they are no longer the fantastic, glittering, gorgeous, throbbing Children of the Dark.

Home we would go, at an hour when the morning star blazed like a lighted torch, and the pearl-gray sky was flushing with pink. No haul he had ever made could have given him such joy as the treasures brought home in dawns like these, so free of evil that his heart was washed in the night dew and swept by the night wind.

My mother, after her pleasant, housewifely fashion, baked a big iced cake for him on the day he replaced his clumsy wooden peg with the life-like artificial limb he himself had earned and paid for. I had wished more than once to hasten this desirable day; but prudently restrained myself, thinking it best for him to work forward unaided. It had taken months of patient work, of frugality, and planning, and counting, and saving, to cover a sum which, once on a time, he might have gotten in an hour's evil effort. And it represented no small achievement and marked no small advance, so that it

was really the feast day we made of it. That limb restored him to a dignity he seemed to have abdicated. It hid his obvious misfortune—you could not at first glance tell that he was a cripple, a something of which he had been morbidly conscious and savagely resentful. He would never again be able to run, or even to walk rapidly for any length of time, although he covered the ground at a good and steady gait; and as he grew more and more accustomed to the limb there was only a slight limp to distinguish him. The use of the stick he thought best to carry became perfunctory. I have seen Kerry carrying that stick when his master had forgotten all about it.

Meeting him now upon the streets, plainly but really well-dressed, scrupulously brushed, his linen immaculate, and with his trimmed red beard, his eyeglasses, and his soft hat, he conveyed the impression of being a professional man—say a pleasantly homely and scholarly college professor. There was a fixed sentiment in Appleboro that I knew very much more about Mr. Flint's past than I would tell—which was perfectly true, and went undenied by me; that he had seen better days; that he had been the black sheep of a good family, gotten into a scrape of some sort, and had then taken to traveling a rough road into a far country, eating husks with the swine, like many another prodigal; and that aware of this I had kept him with me until he found himself again.

So when folks met him and Kerry they smiled and spoke, for we are friendly people and send no man to Coventry without great cause. And there wasn't a

child, black or white, who didn't know and like the man with the butterfly net.

The country people for miles around knew and loved him, too; for he walked up and down the earth and went to and fro in it, full of curious and valuable knowledge shared freely as the need arose. He would glance at your flower-garden, for instance, and tell you what insect visitors your flowers had, and what you should do to check their ravages. He 'd walk about your outbuildings and commend white-wash, and talk about insecticides; and you 'd learn that bees are partial to blue, but flies are not; and that mosquitoes seem to dislike certain shades of yellow. And then he 'd leave you to digest it.

He was a quiet evangelist, a forerunner of that Grand Army which will some day arise, not to murder and maim men, but to conquer man's deadliest foe and greatest economic menace—the injurious insect.

It was he who spread the tidings of Corn and Poultry and Live Stock Clubs, stopping by many a lonely farm to whisper a word in the ears of discouraged boys, or to drop a hint to unenlightened fathers and mothers.

He carried about in his pockets those invaluable reports and bulletins which the government issues for the benefit and enlightenment of farmers; and these were left, with a word of praise, where they would do the most good.

Those same bulletins from the Bureau of Entomology had planted in John Flint's heart the seed which bore such fruit of good citizenship. The whole course of his early years had tended to make him suspicious of gov-

ernment, which spelt for him police and prison, the whole grim machinery which threatened him and which he in turn threatened. He had feared and hated it; it caught men and shut them up and broke them. If he ever asked himself, "What can my government do for me?" he had to answer: "It can put me in prison and keep me there; it can even send me to the Chair." Wherefore government was a thing to hate, to injure —and to escape from.

The first thing he had ever found worthy of respect and admiration in this same government was one of its bulletins.

"Where 'd you get this?"

"I asked for it, and the Bureau sent it."

"Oh! You 've got a friend there!"

"No. The bulletins are free to any one interested enough to ask for them."

"You mean to say the government gets up things like this—pays men to find out and write 'em up—pays to have 'em printed—and then gives 'em away to *anybody?* Why, they 're valuable!"

"Yes; but they are nevertheless quite free. I have a number, if you 'd like to go over them. Or you can send for new ones."

"But why do they do it? Where 's the graft?" he wondered.

"The graft in this case is common sense in operation. If farms can be run with less labor and loss and more profit and pleasure, why, the whole country is benefited, is n't it? Don't you understand, the government is trying to help those who need help, and therefore is willing to lend them the brains of its trained and picked

experts? It isn't the government's fault if the stupid and ignorant and selfish thwart that aim, is it?"

He said nothing. But he read and re-read the bulletins I had, and sent for more, which came to him promptly. They didn't know him, at the Bureau; they asked him no questions; he wasn't going to pay anybody so much as a penny. They assumed that the man who asked for advice and information was entitled to all they could reasonably give him, and they gave it as a matter of course. That is how and why he found himself in touch with his Uncle Sam, a source hitherto disliked and distrusted. This source was glad to put its trained intelligence at his service and the only reward it looked to was his increased capacity to succeed in his work! He simply couldn't dislike or distrust that which benefited him; and as his admiration and respect for the Department of Agriculture grew, unconsciously his respect and admiration for the great government behind it grew likewise. After all, it was *his* government which was reaching across intervening miles, conveying information, giving expert instruction, telling him things he wanted to know and encouraging him to go right on and find out more for himself!

Now if he had asked himself what his government could do for him, he had to answer: "It can help me to make good."

And he began to understand that this was possible because he obeyed the law, and that only in intelligent obedience and co-operation is there any true freedom. The law no longer meant skulking by day and terror by night; it was protection and peace, and a chance to work in the open, and the sympathy and understanding and

comradeship of decent folks. The government was no longer a brute force which arbitrarily popped men into prison; it was the common will of a free people, just as the law was the common conscience.

I dare not say that he learned all this easily, or all at once, or even willingly. None of us learns our great lessons easily. We have to live them, breathe them, work them out with sweat and tears. That we do learn them, even inadequately, makes the glory and the wonder of man.

And so John Flint went to school to the government of the United States, and carried its little text-books about with him and taught them to others in even more need that he; and heckled hopeless boys into Corn Clubs; and coaxed sullen mothers and dissatisfied girls into Poultry and Tomato Clubs; and was full of homely advice upon such living subjects as the spraying of fruit trees, and how to save them from blight and scale-insects, and how to get rid of flies, and cut-worms, and to fight the cattle-tick, which is our curse; and the preservation of birds, concerning which he was rabid. His liking for birds began with Miss Sally Ruth's pigeons and the friendly birds in our garden. And as he learned to know them his love for them grew. I have seen him daily visit a wren's nest without once alarming the little black-eyed mother. I have heard him give the redbird's call, and heard that loveliest of all birds answer him. And I have seen the impudent jays, within reach of his hand, swear at him unabashed and unafraid, because he fed a vireo first.

I like to think of his intimate friendship with the wholesome country children—not the least of his bless-

ings. He was their chief visitor from the outside world. He knew wonderful secrets about things one had n't noticed before, and he could make miracles with his quick strong fingers. He 'd sit down, his stick and knapsack beside him, his glamorous dog at his feet, and while you and your sisters and brothers and friends and neighbors hung about him like a cluster of tow-headed bees, he 'd turn a few sticks and bits of cloth and twine and a tack or two, and an old roller-skate wheel he took out of his pocket, into an air-ship! He could go down by your little creek and make you a water-wheel, or a windmill. He could make you marvelous little men, funny little women, absurd animals, out of corks or peanuts. He knew, too, just exactly the sort of knife your boy-heart ached for—and at parting you found that very knife slipped into your enraptured palm. You might save the pennies you earned by picking berries and gathering nuts, but you could never, never find at any store any candy that tasted like the sticks that came out of his pockets, and you need n't hope to try. He had the inviolable secret of that candy, and he imparted to it a divine flavor no other candy ever possessed. If you were a little doll-less girl, he did n't leave you with the provoking promise that Santa Claus would bring you one if you were good. He was so sure you were good that he made you right then and there a wonderful doll out of corn-husks, with shredded hair, and a frock of his own handkerchief. When he came again you got another doll—a store doll; but I think your child-heart clung to the corn-baby with the handkerchief dress. I have often wondered how many little cheeks snuggled against John Flint's home-made dollies,

how many innocent breasts cradled them; how many a little fellow carried his knife to bed with him, afraid to let it get out of reach of a hard little hand, because he might wake up in the morning and find he had only dreamed it! No, I hardly think the country children were the least of John Flint's blessings. They would run to meet him, hold on to his hands, drag him here and there to show him what wonders their sharp eyes had discovered since his last visit; and give him, with shining eyes, such cocoons and caterpillars, and insects as they had found for him. It was they who called him the Butterfly Man, a name which spread over the whole country-side. If you had asked for John Flint, folks would have stared. And if you described him—a tall man in a Norfolk suit, with a red beard and a red dog, and an insect case:

"Oh, you mean the Butterfly Man! Sure. You 'll find him about somewhere with the kids." If there was anything he could n't have, in that county, it was because folks had n't it to give if he should ask.

At home his passion for work at times terrified me. When I protested:

"I was twenty-five years old when I landed here," he reminded me. "So I 've got twenty-five years' backwork to catch up with."

He had taken over a correspondence that had since become voluminous, and which included more and more names that stood for very much. Sometimes when I read aloud a passage from a letter that praised him, he turned red, and writhed like a little boy whose ears are being relentlessly washed by his elders.

By this time he had learned to really classify; heav-

ens, how unerringly he could place an insect in its proper niche! It was a sort of sixth sense with him. That cold, clear, incisive power of brain which on a time had made Slippy McGee the greatest cracksman in America, was, trained and disciplined in a better cause, to make John Flint in later years an international authority upon lepidoptera, an observer to whom other observers deferred, a naturalist whose dictum settled disputed points. And I knew it, I foresaw it!

Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa! I grew as vain over his enlarging powers as if I had been the Mover of the Game, not a pawn. I felt, gloriously, that I had not lived for nothing. A great naturalist is not born every day, no, nor every year, nor even every century. And I had caught me a great burglar and I had hatched me a great naturalist! My Latin soul was enraptured with this ironic anomaly. I could not choose but love the man for that.

I really had some cause for vanity. Others than myself had been gradually drawn to the unassuming Butterfly Man. Westmoreland loved him. A sympathetic listener who seldom contradicted, but often shrewdly suggested, Flint somehow knew how to bring out the big doctor's best; and in consequence found himself in contact with a mind above all meanness and a nature as big and clean as a spray-swept beach.

"Oh, my, my, my, what a surgeon gone to waste!" Westmoreland would lament, watching the long, sure fingers at work. "Well, I suppose it 's all for the best that Father De Rancé beat me to you—at least you 've done less damage learning your trade." So absorbed would he become that he sometimes forgot cross patients

who were possibly fuming themselves into a fever over his delay.

Eustis, who had met the Butterfly Man on the country roads and had stopped his horse for an informal chat, would thereafter go out of his way for a talk with him. These two reticent men liked each other immensely. At opposite poles, absolutely dissimilar, they yet had odd similarities and meeting-points. Eustis was nothing if not practical; he was never too busy to forget to be kind. Books and pamphlets that neither Flint nor I could have hoped to possess found their way to us through him. Scientific periodicals and the better magazines came regularly to John Flint's address. That was Eustis's way. This friendship put the finishing touch upon the Butterfly Man's repute. He was my associate, and my mother was devoted to him. Miss Sally Ruth, whose pet pear-tree he had saved and whose pigeons he had cured, approved of him, too, and said so with her usual openness. Westmoreland was known to be his firm friend; nobody could forget the incident of those butterflies in the doctor's hat! Major Cartwright liked him so much that he even bore with the dogs, though Pitache in particular must have sorely strained his patience. Pitache cherished the notion that it was his duty to pass upon all visitors to the Butterfly Man's rooms. For some reason, known only to himself, the little dog also cherished a deep-seated grudge against the major, the very sound of whose voice outside the door was enough to send him howling under the table, where he lay with his head on his paws, a wary eye cocked balefully, and his snarls punctuating the Major's remarks.

"He smells my Unitarian soul, confound him!" said the major. "An' he 's so orthodox he thinks he 'll get chucked out of dog-heaven, if he does n't show his disapproval."

The little dog did finally learn to accept the major's presence without outward protest; though the major declared that Pitache always hung down his tail when he came and hung it up when he left!

The Butterfly Man accepted whatever friendliness was proffered without diffidence, but with no change in his natural reserve. You could tell him anything: he listened, made few comments and gave no advice, was absolutely non-shockable, and never repeated what he heard. The unaffected simplicity of his manner delighted my mother. She said you could n't tell her—there was good blood in that man, and he had been more than any mere tramp before he fell into our hands! Why, just observe his manner, if you please! It was the same to everybody; he had, one might think, no sense whatever of caste, creed, age, sex, or color; and yet he neither gave offense nor received it.

Those outbursts which had so terrified me at first came at rare and rarer intervals. If I were to live for a thousands years I should never be able to forget the last and worst; which fell upon him suddenly and without warning, on a fine morning while he sat on the steps of his verandah, and I beside him with my Book of Hours in my hand. In between the Latin prayers I sensed pleasantly the light wind that rustled the vines, and how the Mayne bees went grumbling from flower to flower, and how one single bird was singing to himself over and over the self-same song, as if he loved it; and how the

sunlight fell in a great square, like a golden carpet, in front of the steps. It was all very still and peaceful. I was just turning a page, when John Flint jerked his pipe out of his mouth, swung his arm back, and hurled the pipe as far as he could. I watched it, involuntarily, and saw where it fell among our blue hydrangeas; from which a thin spiral of smoke arose lazily in the calm air. But Flint shoved his hat back on his head, sat up stiffly, and swore.

He had been with me then nearly four years, and I had learned to know the symptoms:—restlessness, followed by hours of depressed and sullen brooding. So I had heretofore in a sense been forewarned, though I never witnessed one of these outbursts without being shaken to the depths. This one was different—as if the evil force had invaded him suddenly, giving him no time to resist. A glance at his face made me lay aside the book hurriedly; for this was no ordinary struggle. The words that had come to me at first came back now with redoubled meaning, and rang through my head like passing-bells:

"For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against . . . the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness."

He tilted his head, looked upward, and swore steadily. As for me, my throat felt as if it had been choked with ashes. I could only stare at him, dumbly. If ever a man was possessed, he was. His voice rose, querulously:

"I get up in the morning, and I catch bugs, and I study them, and I dry them—and I go to bed. I get up in the morning, and I catch bugs, and I study them, and I dry them—and I go to bed. I get up *every* morn-

ing, and I do the same damn thing, over and over and over and over, day in, day out, day in, day out. Nothing else. . . . No drinks, no lights, no girls, no sprees, no cards, no gang, no risks, no jobs, no bulls, no anything! God! I could say my prayers to Broadway, anywhere from the Battery up to Columbus Circle! I want it all so hard I could point my nose like a lost dog and howl for it!

". . . . There is a Dutchman got a restaurant down on Eighth Avenue, and I dream at nights about the hot-dog-and-kraut, and the ham-and that they give you there, and the jane that slings it. Hips on her like a horse, she has, and an arm that shoves your eats under your nose in a way you 've got to respect. I smell those eats in my sleep. I want some more Childs' bucks. I want to see the electrics winking on the roofs. I want to smell wet asphalt and see the taxis whizzing by in the rain. I want to see a seven-foot Mick cop with a back like a piano-box and a paw like a ham and a foot like a submarine with stove-polish on it. I want to see the subway in the rush hour and the dips and mollbuzzers going through the crowd like kids in a berry patch. I want to see a ninety-story building going up, and the wops crawling on it like ants. I want to see the bread-line, and the panhandlers, and the bums in Union Square. I want a bellyful of the happy dust the old town hands out—the whole dope and all there is of it! My God! I want everything I haven't got!"

He looked at me, wildly. He was trembling violently, and sweat poured down his face.

"Parson," he rasped, "I 've bucked this thing for fair, but I 've got to go back and see it and smell it and

taste it and feel it and know it all again, or I 'll go crazy. You 're all of you so good down here you 're too much for me. *I 'm home-sick for hell.* It—it comes over me like fire over the damned. You don't fool yourself that folks who know what it is to be damned can stay on in heaven without freezing, do you? Well, they can't. I can't help it! I can't! I 've got to go—this time I 've got to go!"

I sat and stared at him. Oh, what was it Paul had said we were to pray for, at such a time as this?

"And for me, that speech may be given to me . . . that I may open my mouth with confidence . . ."

But the words would n't come.

"I 've got to go! I 've got to go, and try myself out!" he gritted.

"You—understand your risks," I managed to say through stiff lips. I had always, in my secret heart, been more or less afraid of this. Always had I feared that the rulers of the world of darkness, swooping down and catching him unaware, might win the long fight in the end.

"Here you are safe. You are building up an honored name. You are winning the respect and confidence of all decent people—and you wish to undo it all. You wish to take such desperate chances—now!" I groaned.

"I 've got to go!" he burst forth, white-lipped. "You 've never seen a dip cut off from his dope, have you? Well, I 'm it, when the old town calls me loud enough for me to hear her plain. I 've stood her off as long as I could—and now I 'm that crazy for her I could wallow in her dust. Besides, there 's not such a

lot of risks. I don't have to leave my card at the station-house to let 'em know I 'm calling, do I? They have n't been sitting on what they think is my grave to keep me from getting up before Gabriel beats 'em to it, have they? No, they 're not expecting *me*. What I could do to 'em now would make the Big Uns look like a bunch of pikers—and their beans would have to turn inside out before they fell for it that *I 'd* come back to my happy home and was on the job again."

"If—if you had n't been so white, I 'd have cut and run for it without ever putting you wise. But I want to play fair. I 'd be a hog if I did n't play fair, and I 'm trying to do it. I 'm going because I can't stay. I 've got enough of my own money, earned honest, saved up, to pay my way. Let me take it and go. And if I can come back, why, I 'll come."

He was stone deaf to entreaties, prayers, reasoning, argument. The four years of his stay with me, and all their work, and study, and endeavor, and progress, seemed to have slipped from him as if they had never been. They were swept aside like cobwebs. He broke away from me in the midst of my pleading, hurried into his bedroom, and began to sort into a grip a few necessities.

"I 'll leave on the three-o'clock," he flung over his shoulder to me, standing disconsolate in the door. "I 'll stop at the bank on my way." I could do nothing; he had taken the bit between his teeth and was bolting. I had for the time being lost all power of control over him, and before I might hope to recover it he would be out of my reach. Perhaps, I reflected wretchedly, the

best thing to do under the circumstances, would simply be to give him his head. I had seen horses conquered like that. But the road before John Flint was so dark and so crooked—and at the end of it waited Slippy McGee!

CHAPTER VIII

THE BUTTERFLY MAN

IT was just one-thirty by the placid little clock on his mantel. The express was due at three.

"Very well," said I, forcing myself to face the inevitable without noise, "you are free. If you must go, you must go."

"I 've got to go! I 've got to go!" He repeated it as one repeats an incantation. "I 've got to go!" And he went on methodically assorting and packing. Even at this moment of obsession his ingrained orderliness asserted itself; the things he rejected were laid back in their proper place with the nicest care.

I went over to tell my mother that John Flint had suddenly decided to go north. She expressed no surprise, but immediately fell to counting on her fingers his available shirts, socks, and underwear. She rather hoped he would buy a new overcoat in New York, his old one being hardly able to stand the strain of another winter. She was pleasantly excited; she knew he had many northern correspondents, with whom he must naturally be anxious to foregather. There was much to call him thither.

"He really needs the change. A short trip will do him a world of good," she concluded equably. "He is still quite a young man, and I 'm sure it must be dull

for him here at times, in spite of his work. Why, he has n't been out of this county for over three years, and just think of the unfettered life he must have led before he came here! Yes, I 'm sure New York will stimulate him. A dose of New York is a very good tonic. It regulates one's mental liver. Don't look so worried, Armand —you remind me of those hens who hatch ducklings. I should think a duckling of John Flint's size could be trusted to swim by himself, at his time of life!''

She had not my cause for fear. Besides, in her secret heart, Madame was convinced that, rehabilitated, reclaimed, having more than proven his intrinsic worth, John Flint went to be reconciled with and received into the bosom of some preëminently proper parent, and to be acclaimed and applauded by admiring and welcoming friends. For although she had once heard the Butterfly Man gravely assure Miss Sally Ruth Dexter that the only ancestor his immediate Flints were sure of was Flint the pirate, my mother still clung firmly to the illusion of Family. Blood will tell!

As for me, I was equally sure that blood was telling now; and telling in the atrocious tongue of the depths. I felt that the end had come. Vain, vain, all the labor, all the love, all the hope, the prayers, the pride! The submerged voice of his old life was calling him; the vampire extended her white and murderous arms in which many and many had died shamefully; she lifted to his her insatiable lips stained scarlet with the wine of hell. Against that siren smile, those beckoning hands, I could do nothing. The very fact that I was what I am, was no longer a help, but rather a hindrance; he recognized in the priest a deterring and detaining influ-

ence against which he rebelled, and which he wished to repudiate. He was, as he had said so terribly, "homesick for hell." He would go, and he would most inevitably be caught in the whirlpools; the naturalist, the scientist, the Butterfly Man, would be sucked into that boiling vortex and drowned beyond all hope of resuscitation; but from it the soul of Slippy McGee would emerge, with a larger knowledge and a clearer brain, a thousandfold more deadly dangerous than of old; because this time he knew better and had deliberately chosen the evil and rejected the good. By the law of the pendulum he must swing as far backward into wrong as he had swung forward into right.

I could not bring myself to speak to him, I dared not bid him the mockery of a Godspeed upon his journey, dreading as I did that journey's end. So I stood at a window and watched him as with suitcase in hand he walked down our shady street. At the corner he turned and lifted his hat in a last farewell salute to my mother, standing looking after him in the Parish House gate. Then he turned down the side-street, and so disappeared.

From his closed rooms came a long wailing howl. For the first time Kerry might not follow his master; more yet, the master had thrust the astonished dog into his bedroom and shut the door upon him. He had refused to recognize the scratch at the door, the snuffling whine through the keyhole. The outer door had slammed. Kerry raced to the window. And the master was going, and going without him! He had neither net, knapsack, nor bottle-belt, but he carried a suitcase. He did not look back, nor whistle: he *meant* to leave him behind. Sensing that an untoward thing was occurring, a thing

that boded no good to himself or his beloved, the red dog lifted his voice and howled a piercing protest.

The sash was down, but the blinds had not yet been closed to. One saw Kerry standing with his forepaws on the window-sill, his nose against the glass, his ears lifted, his eyes anxious and distressed, his lip caught in his teeth. At intervals he threw back his head, and then came the howls.

The catastrophe—for to me it was no less a thing—had come upon me so suddenly that I was fairly stunned. From sheer force of habit I went over to the church and knelt before the altar; but I could not pray; I could only kneel there dumbly. I heard the screech of the three o'clock express coming in, and, a few minutes later, its longer screech as it departed. He had gone, then! I was not dreaming it: it was true. Down and down and down went my heart. And down and down and down went my head, humbled and prostrate. Alas, the end of hope, the fall of pride! Alas and alas for the fair house built upon the sand, wrecked and scattered!

When I rose from my knees I staggered. I walked draggingly, as one walks with fetters upon the feet. Oh, it was a cruel world, a world in which nothing but inevitable loss awaited one, in which one was foredoomed to disappointment; a world in which one was leaf by leaf stripped bare.

I could not bear to look at his closed rooms, but turned my head aside as I passed them. Disconsolate Kerry barked at my passing step, and pawed frantically at the window, but I made no effort to release him. What comfort had I for the faithful creature, deserted by what he most loved?

His dismal outcries rasped my nerves raw; it was exactly as if the dog howled for the dead. And that John Flint was dead I had no reasonable cause to doubt. *He was dead because Slippy McGee was alive.* That thought drove me as with a whip out into the garden, for as black an hour as I have ever lived through—the sort of hour that leaves a scar upon the soul. The garden was very still, steeped and drowsing in the bright clear sunlight; only the bees were busy there, calling from flower-door to flower-door, and sometimes a vireo's sweet whistle fluted through the leaves. Pitache lay on John Flint's porch, and dozed with his head between his paws; Judge Mayne's Panch sat on the garden fence, and washed his black face, and watched the little dog out of his emerald eyes. All along the fences the scarlet salvia shot up its vivid spikes, and when the wind stirred, the red petals fell from it like drops of blood.

It seemed to me incongruous and cruel that one should suffer on such a day; grief is for gray days; but the sunlight mocks sorrow, the soft wind makes light of it. I was out of tune with this harmony, as I walked up and down with my rosary in my hand. I knew that every flying minute took him farther and farther away from me and from hope and happiness and honor, and brought him nearer and nearer to the whirlpool and the pit. I beat my hands together and the crucifix cut into my palms. I walked more rapidly, as if I could get away from the misery within. My heart ached intolerably, a mist dimmed my sight, and a hideous choking lump rose in my throat; and it seemed to me that, old and futile and alone, I was set down, not in my garden, but in the midst of the abomination of desolation.

Through this aching desolation Kerry's cries stabbed like knife-thrusts. . . . And then little Pitache lifted his head, cocked a listening ear and an alert eye, perked up his black nose, thumped an expressive tail, and barked. It was a welcoming bark; Kerry, hearing it, stiffened statue-like at the window and fell to whining in his throat. The garden gate had clicked.

Dreading that any mortal eye should see me thus in my grief, knowing it was beyond my power of endurance to meet calmly or to speak coherently with any human being at that moment, I turned, with the instinct of flight strong upon me. I knew I must be alone, to face this thing in its inevitableness, to fight it out, to get my bearings. The gate was turning upon its hinges; I could hear it creak.

Hesitating which way to turn, I looked up to see who it was that was coming into the Parish House garden. And I fell to trembling, and rubbed my eyes, and stared again, unbelievingly. There had been plenty of time for him to have visited the bank and withdrawn his account; there had been plenty of time for him then to have caught the three-o'clock express. I had heard the train come and go this full hour since. Surely my wish was father to the thought that I saw him before me—my old eyes were playing me a trick—for I thought I saw John Flint walking up the garden path toward me! Pitache barked again, rose, stretched himself, and trotted to meet him, as he always did when the Butterfly Man came home.

He walked with the limp most noticeable when he tried to hurry. He was flushed and perspiring and rumpled and well-nigh breathless; his coat was wrinkled,

his tie awry, his collar wilted, and bits of grass and twigs and a leaf or so clung to his dusty clothes. The afternoon sun shone full on his thick, close-cropped hair, for he carried his hat in his hands, gingerly, carefully, as one might carry a fragile treasure; a clean pocket handkerchief was tied over it.

He was making straight for his workroom. I do not think he saw me until I stepped into the path, directly in front of him. Then, stopping perforce, he looked at me with dancing eyes, wiped his red perspiring face with one hand, and nodded to the hat, triumphantly.

"Such an—aberrant!" he panted. He was still breathing so rapidly he had to jerk his words out. "I 've got the—biggest, handsomest—most perfect and wonderful—specimen of—an aberrant swallow-tail—any man ever laid—his eyes on! I thought at first—I was n't seeing things right. But I was. Parson, parson, I 've seen many—butterflies—but never—another one like—this!" He had to pause, to take breath. Then he burst out again, unable to contain his delight.

"Oh, it was the luckiest chance! I was standing on the end platform of the last car, and the train was pulling out, when I saw her go sailing by. I stared with all my eyes, shut 'em, stared again, and there she was! I knew there was never going to be such another, that if I lost her I 'd mourn for the rest of my days. I knew I had to have her. So I measured my distance, risked my neck, and jumped for her. Game leg and all I jumped, landed in the pit of a nigger's stomach, went down on top of him, scrambled up again and was off in a jiffy, with the darky bawling he 'd been killed and the station buzzing like the judge's bees on strike, and people hang-

ing out of all the car windows to see who 'd been murdered.

"She led me the devil's own chase, for I 'd nothing but my hat to net her with. A dozen times I thought I had her, and missed. It was heart-breaking. I felt I 'd go stark crazy if she got away from me. I had to get her. And the Lord was good and rewarded me for my patience, for I caught her at the end of a mile run. I was so blown by then that I had to lie down in the grass by the roadside and get my wind back. Then I slid my handkerchief easy-easy under my hat, tilted it up, and here she is! She has n't hurt herself, for she 's been quiet. She 's perfect. She has n't rubbed off a scale. She 's the size of a bat. Her upper wings, and one lower wing, are black, curiously splotched with yellow, and one lower wing is all yellow. She 's got the usual orange spots on the secondaries, only bigger, and blobs of gold, and the purple spills over onto the ground-color. She 's a wonder. Come on in and let 's gloat at our ease—I have n't half seen her yet! She 's the biggest and most wonderful Turnus ever made. Why, Gabriel could wear her in his crown to make himself feel proud, because there 'd be only one like her in heaven!"

He took a step forward; but I could only stand still and blink, owlishly. My heart pounded and the blood roared in my ears like the wind in the pinetrees. My senses were in a most painful confusion, with but one thought struggling clear above the turmoil: that *John Flint had come back.*

"But you did n't go!" I stammered. "Oh, John Flint, John Flint, you did n't go!"

He snorted. "Catch me running away like a fool

when a six-inch off-color swallow-tail flirts herself under my nose and dares me to catch her! You 'd better believe I did n't go!"

And then I knew with a great uprush of joy that Slippy McGee himself had gone instead, and the three-o'clock express was bearing him away, forever and forever, beyond recall or return. Slippy McGee had gone into the past; he was dead and done with. But John Flint the naturalist was vibrantly and vitally alive, built upon the living rock, a house not to be washed away by any wave of passion.

This reaction from the black and bitter hour through which I had just passed, this turbulent joy and relief, overcame me. My knees shook and gave way; I tottered, and sank helplessly into the seat built around our great magnolia. And shaken out of all self-control I wept as I had not been permitted to weep over my own dead, my own overthrown hopes. Head to foot I was shaken as with some rending sickness. The sobs were torn out of my throat with gasps.

He stood stone still. He went white, and his nostrils grew pinched, and in his set face only his eyes seemed alive and suffering. They blinked at me, as if a light had shone too strongly upon them. A sort of inarticulate whimper came from him. Then with extreme care he laid the handkerchief-covered hat upon the ground, and down upon his knees he went beside me, his arms about my knees. He, too, was trembling.

"Father! . . . *Father!*"

"My son. . . . I was afraid . . . you were lost . . . gone . . . into a far country. . . . It would have broken my heart!"

He said never a word; but hung his head upon his breast, and clung to my knees. When he raised his eyes to mine, their look was so piteous that I had to put my hand upon him, as one reassures one's child. So for a healing time we two remained thus, both silent. The garden was exquisitely still and calm and peaceful. We were shut in and canopied by walls and roof of waving green, lighted with great cream-colored flowers with hearts of gold, and dappled with sun and shadow. Through it came the vireo's fairy flute.

God knows what thoughts went through John Flint's mind; but for me, a great peace stole upon me, mixed with a greater, reverent awe and wonder. Oh, heart of little faith! I had been afraid; I had doubted and despaired and been unutterably wretched; I had thought him lost whom the Powers of Darkness swooped upon, conquered, and led astray. And God had needed nothing stronger than a butterfly's fragile wing to bear a living soul across the abyss!

We went together, after a while, to his rooms, and when he had submitted to Kerry's welcome, we carefully examined the beautiful insect he had captured. As he had said, she had not lost a scale; and she was by far the most astonishing aberrant I have ever seen, before or since. The Turnus is perhaps the most beautiful of our butterflies, and this off-color was larger than the normal, and more irregularly and oddly and brilliantly colored. Their natural coloring is gorgeous enough; but hers was like a seraph's head-jewels.

I have her yet, with the date of her capture written under her. She is the only one of all our butterflies I

claim personally. The gold has never been minted that could buy that Turnus.

"I had the station agent wire for my grip," said Flint casually. "And I gave the darky I knocked down fifty cents to soothe his feelings. He offered to let me do it again for a quarter." His eyes roved over the pleasant workroom with its books and cabinets, its air of homely comfort; through the open door one glimpsed the smaller bedroom, the crucifix on the white wall. He dropped his hand on Kerry's head, close against his knee, and drew a sharp breath.

"Father," said he, quietly, and looked at me with steady eyes, "you don't need to be afraid for me any more as you had to be to-day. To-day 's the last of my —my dumfoolishness." After a moment he added:

"Remember what that little girl said when she gave me her dog? Well, I reckon she was right. I reckon I 'm here for keeps. I reckon, father, that you and I do belong."

"Yes," said I; and looked over the cases of our butterflies, and the books we had gathered, and the table where we worked and studied together. "Yes; you and I belong." And I left him with Kerry's head on his knees, and Kerry's eyes adoring him, and went over to the Parish House to tell Madame that John Flint had changed his mind and would n't go North just now, because an aberrant Turnus had beguiled him.

For a moment my mother looked profoundly disappointed.

"Are you sure," she asked, "that this does n't mean a loss to him, Armand?"

"Yes, I am sure."

She watched my eyes, and of a sudden she reached out, caught my hand, and squeezed it. Her face softened with sympathetic and tolerant understanding, but she asked no questions, made no comment. If Solomon had been lucky enough to marry my mother, I am sure he would never have plagued himself with the nine hundred and ninety-nine. But then, neither would he have written Proverbs.

Neither the Butterfly Man nor I have ever referred to that morning's incident; the witness of it we cherish; otherwise it pleases us to ignore it as if it had never happened. It had, of course, its results, for with a desperate intensity of purpose he plunged back into study and research; and as the work was broadening, and called for all his skill and patience, the pendulum swung him far forward again.

I had been so fascinated, watching that transformation, even more wonderful than any butterfly's, going on before my eyes; I was so enmeshed in the web of endless duties spun for me by my big poor parish that I did not have time to miss Mary Virginia as poignantly as I must otherwise have done, although my heart longed for her.

My mother never ceased to mourn her absence; something went away from us with Mary Virginia, which could only come back to us with her. But it so happened that the ensuing summers failed to bring her back. The little girl spent her vacations with girl friends of whose standing her mother approved, or with relatives she thought it wise the child should cultivate. For

the time being, Mary Virginia had vanished out of our lives.

Laurence, however, spent all his vacations at home; and of Laurence we were immensely proud. Most of his holidays were spent, not with younger companions, but oddly enough with John Flint. That old friendship, renewed after every parting, seemed to have grown stronger with the boy's growth; the passing years deepened it.

"My boy 's forever boasting of your Butterfly Man," said the judge, falling into step with me one morning on the street. "He tells me Flint 's been made a member of several learned societies; and that he 's gotten out a book of sorts, telling all there is to tell about some crawling plague or other. And it seems this is n't all the wonderful Mr. Flint is capable of: Laurence insists that biologists will have to look Flintward pretty soon, on account of observations on what he calls insect allies—whatever *they* are."

"Well, you see, his work on insect allies is really unique and thorough, and it opens a door to even more valuable research," said I, as modestly as I could. "Flint is one of its great pioneers, and he 's blazing the way. Some day when the real naturalist comes into his own, he will rank far, far above tricky senators and mutable governors!"

The judge smiled. "Spoken like a true bughunter," said he. "As a matter of fact, this fellow is a remarkable man. Does he intend to remain here for good?"

"Yes," said I, "I think he intends to remain here—for good." I could not keep the pride out of my voice and eyes. Let me again admit my grave fault: I am a vain and proud old man, God forgive me!

"Your goose turned out a butterfly," said the judge. "One may well be pardoned a little natural vanity when one has engineered a feat like that! Common tramp, too, was n't he?"

"No, he was n't. He was a most uncommon one."

"I could envy the man his spontaneity and originality," admitted the judge, rubbing his nose. "Well, father, I 'm perfectly satisfied, so far, to have my only son tramp with him."

"So is my mother," said I.

At that the judge lifted his hat with a fine old-fashioned courtesy good to see in this age when a youth walks beside a maid and blows cigarette smoke in her face upon the public streets.

"When such a lady approves of any man," said he, gallantly, "it confers upon him letters patent of nobility."

"We shall have to consider John Flint knighted, then," said my mother merrily, when I repeated the conversation. "Let 's see," she continued gaily. "We 'll put on his shield three butterflies, or, rampant on a field, azure; in the lower corner a net, argent. Motto, *'In Hoc Signo Vinces.'* There 'll be no sign of the cyanide jar. I 'll have nothing sinister shadowing the Butterfly Man's escutcheon!"

She knew nothing about the trust St. Stanislaus kept; she had never met Slippy McGee.

CHAPTER IX

NESTS

LAURENCE at last hung out that shingle which was to tingle Appleboro into step with the Time-spirit. It was a very happy and important day for the judge and his immediate friends, though Appleboro at large looked on with but apathetic interest. One more little legal light flickering "in our midst" did n't make much difference; we literally have lawyers to burn. So we are n't too enthusiastic over our fledglings; we wait for them to show us—which is good for them, and sometimes better for us.

This fledgling, however, was of the stuff which endures. Laurence was one of those dynamic and dangerous people who not only think independently themselves, but have the power to make other people think. No one who came in contact with him escaped this; it seemed to crackle electrically in the air around him; he was a sort of human thought-conductor, and he shocked many a smug and self-satisfied citizen into horrific life before he had done with him.

If this young man had not been one of the irreproachable Maynes Appleboro might have set him down as a pestilent and radical theorist and visionary. But fortunately for us and himself he was a Mayne; and the Maynes have been from the dawn of things Carolinian "a good family."

I don't think I have ever seen two people so mutually delight in each other's powers as did John Flint and Laurence Mayne. The Butterfly Man was immensely proud of Laurence's handsome person and his grace of speech and manner; he had even a more profound respect for his more solid attainments, for his own struggle upward had deepened his regard for higher education. As for Laurence, he thought his friend marvelous; what he had overcome and become made him in the younger man's eyes an incarnate proof of the power of will and of patience. The originality and breadth of his views fired the boy's imagination and broadened his personality. The two complemented each other.

The Butterfly Man's workroom had a fascination for others than Laurence. It was a sort of Open Question Club. Here Westmoreland came to air his views with a free tongue and to ride his hobbies with a gallant zest; here the major, tugging at his goatee, his glasses far down on his nose, narrated in spicy chapters the Secret Social History of Appleboro. Here the judge—for he, too, had fallen into the habit of strolling over of an evening—sunk in the old Morris chair, his cigar gone cold in his fingers, reviewed great cases. And sometimes Eustis stopped by, spoke in his modest fashion of his experiments, and left us all the better for his quiet strength. And Flint, with his eyes alive and watchful behind his glasses, listened with that air which made one like to tell him things. Laurence declared that he got his post-graduate course in John Flint's workroom, and that the Butterfly Man was n't the least of his teachers.

I should dearly like to say that the Awakening of

Appleboro began in that workroom; and in a way it did. But it really had its inception in a bird's nest John Flint had discovered and watched with great interest and pleasure. The tiny mother had learned to accept his approach without fear; he said she knew him personally. She allowed him to approach close enough to touch her; she even took food out of his fingers. He had worked toward that friendliness with great skill and patience, and his success gave him infinite pleasure. He had a great tenderness for the little brown lady, and he looked forward to her babies with an almost grandfatherly eagerness. The nest was over in a corner of our garden, in a thick evergreen bush big enough to be called a young tree.

Now on a sunny morning Laurence and I and the Butterfly Man walked in our garden. Laurence had gotten his first brief, and we two older fellows were somewhat like two old birds fluttering over an adventurous fledgling. I think we saw the boy sitting on the Supreme Court bench, that morning!

As we neared the evergreen tree the Butterfly Man raised his hand to caution us to be silent. He wanted us to see his wee friend's reception of him, and so he went on a bit ahead, to let her know she need n't be afraid—we, too, were merely big friends come a-calling. And just then we heard shrill cries of distress, and above it the louder, raucous scream of the bluejay.

The bluejay was entirely occupied with his own business of breaking into another bird's nest and eating the eggs. He scolded violently between mouthfuls; he had finished three eggs and begun on the fourth and last when we came upon the scene. He had no fear of us;

he had seen us before, and he knew very well indeed that the red-bearded creature with the cane was a particular and peculiar friend of feathered folks. So he cocked a knowing head, with a cruel beak full of egg, and flirted a splendid tail at his friend; then swallowed the last morsel and rowed viciously with Laurence and me; for the bluejay is wholly addicted to billingsgate. He paid no attention to the distraught mother-bird, fluttering and crying on a limb nearby.

"Gosh, pal, I 've sure had some meal!" said the bluejay to John Flint. "Chase that skirt, over there, please —she makes too much noise to suit me!"

But for once John Flint was n't a friend to a bluejay —he uttered an exclamation of sorrow and dismay.

"My nest!" he cried tragically. "My beautiful nest with the four eggs, that I 've been watching day by day! And the little mother-thing that knew me, and let me touch her, and feed her, and was n't afraid of me! Oh, you blue devil! You thief! You murderer!" And in a great gust of sorrow and anger he lifted his stick to hurl it at the criminal. Laurence caught the upraised arm.

"But he does n't know he 's a thief and a murderer," said he, and looked at the handsome culprit with unwilling admiration. The jay, having finished the nest to his entire satisfaction, hopped down upon a limb and turned his attention to us. He screamed at Laurence, thrusting forward his impudent head; while the poor robbed mother, with lamentable cries, watched him from a safe distance. Full of his cannibal meal, Mister Bluejay callously ignored her. He was more interested in us. Down he came, nearer yet, with a flirt of fine wings, a

spreading of barred tail, just above Flint's head, and talked jocularly to his friend in jayese.

"You 're a thief and a robber!" raged the Butterfly Man. "You 're a damn little bird-killer, that 's what you are! I ought to wring your neck for you, and I 'd do it if it would do the rest of your tribe any good. But it would n't. It would n't bring back the lost eggs nor the spoiled nest, either. Besides, you don't know any better. You 're what you are because you were hatched like that, and there was n't Anything to tell you what 's right and wrong for a decent bird to do. The best one can do for you is to get wise to your ways and watch out that you can't do more mischief."

The bluejay, with his handsome crested head on one side, cocked his bright black eye knowingly, and passed derisive remarks. Any one who has listened attentively to a bluejay must be deeply grateful that the gift of articulate speech has been wisely withheld from him; he is a hooligan of a bird. He lifted his wings like half-playful fists. If he had fingers, be sure a thumb had been lifted profanely to his nose.

The Butterfly Man watched him for a moment in silence; a furrow came to his forehead.

"Damn little thief!" he muttered. "And you don't even have to care! No! It 's not right. There ought to be some way to save the mothers and the nests from your sort—without having to kill you, either. But good Lord, how? That 's what I want to know!"

"Beat 'em to it and stand 'em off," said Laurence, staring at the ravaged nest, the unhappy mother, the gorged impenitent thief. "'Git thar fustest with the mostest men.' Have the nests so protected the thief

can't get in without getting caught. Build Better Bird Houses, say, and enforce a Law of the Garden—Room and Food for all, Pillage for None. You 'd have to expect some spoiled nests, of course, for you could n't be on guard all the time, and you could n't make all the birds live in your Better Bird Houses—they would n't know how. But you 'd save some of them, at any rate."

"Think so?" said John Flint. "Huh! And what 'd you do with *him?*" And he jerked his head at the screaming jay.

"Let him alone, so long as he behaved. Shoo him outside when he did n't—and see that he kept outside," said Laurence. "You see, the idea is n't so much to reform bluejays—it 's to save the other birds from them."

John Flint's face was troubled. "It 's all a muddle, anyhow," said he. "You can't blame the bluejay, because he was born so, and it 's bluejay nature to act like that when it gets the chance. But there 's the other bird—it looks bad. It is bad. For a thief to come into a little nest like that, that she 'd been brooding on, and twittering to, and feeling so good and so happy about— Man, I 'd have given a month 's work and pay to have saved that nest! It 's not fair. God! Is n't there *some* way to save the good ones from the bad ones?"

There he stood, in the middle of the path, staring ruefully at the wrecked bit of twigs and moss and down that had been a wee home; and with more of sorrow than anger at the feathered crook who had done the damage. The thing was slight in itself, and more than common—just one of the unrecorded humble tragedies which daily

engulf the Little Peoples. But I had seen a butterfly's wing save him alive; and so I did not doubt now that a little bird's nest could weigh down the balance which would put him definitely upon the side of good and of God.

"I think there is a way," said Laurence, gravely, "and that is to beat them to it and stand them off. All the rest is talk and piffle—the only way to save is to save. There are no halfway measures; also, it 's a lifetime job, full of kicks and cuffs and ingratitude and misunderstanding and failure and loneliness, and sometimes even worse things yet. But you do manage to sometimes save the nests and the fledglings, and you do sometimes escape the pain of hearing the mothers lamenting. And that 's the only reward a decent mortal ought to hope for. I reckon it 's about the best reward there is, this side of heaven."

The Butterfly Man swallowed this a bit ungraciously.

"You 've got a devil of a way of twisting things into parables. I 'm talking birds and thinking birds, and here you must go and make my birds people! I was n't thinking about people—that is, I was n't, until you have to go and put the notion into my head. It 's not fair. The thing 's bad enough already, without your lugging folks into it and making it worse!"

Laurence looked at him steadily. "You 've got to think of people, when you see things like that," said he, slowly; "otherwise you only half-see. I have to think of people—of kids, particularly—and their mothers." He turned as he spoke, and stared out over our garden, with its sunny spaces, and its shrubs and flowers, and trees, to where, over in the sky a pillar of smoke rose

steadily, endlessly, and merged into a cloud overhanging the quiet little town.

"The pillar of cloud by day," said he "that leads the children—" He stopped, and the whimsical smile faded from his face; his jaw set.

The bluejay, having exhausted his vocabulary of jay-ribaldry, screeched one last outrageous bit of billingsgate into Flint's ears, shut up his tail like a fan, and darted off, a streak of blue and gray. The Butterfly Man's eyes followed him smilelessly; then they came back and dwelt for a moment upon the ruined nest and the fluttering mother-bird, still vexing the ear with her shrill lamentable futile protests. From her his eyes went, out over the trees and flowers to that pillar mounting lazily and inevitably into the sky. For a long moment he stared at that, too, fixedly. After an interval he clenched his hand upon his stick and struck the ground.

"*Nothing 's* got any business to break up a nest! I 'd rather sit up all night and watch than see what I 've just seen and listen to that mother-thing calling to Something that 's far-off and stone deaf and can't hear nor heed. Why, the little birds have n't got even the chance to get themselves born, much less grow up and sing! I— Say, you two go on a bit. I feel mighty bad about this. I 'd been watching her. She knew me. She let me feed her. If only I 'd thought about the jay, why, I might have saved her. But just when she needed me I wasn 't there!" He turned abruptly, and strode off toward his own rooms. Kerry followed with a drooping head and tail. But Laurence looked after him hopefully.

"Padre, the Butterfly Man 's seen something this morn-

ing that will sink to the bottom of his soul and stay there: didn't you see his eyes? Now, which of those two have taught him the most—the happy thief and murderer, or the innocent unhappy victim? The bluejay 's not a whit the worse for it, remember; in fact, he 's all the better off, for his stomach is full and his mischief satisfied, and that 's all that ever worries a bluejay. And there is n't any redress for the mother-bird. The thing 's done, and can't be undone. But between them they 've shown John Flint something that forces a man to take sides. Does n't the bluejay deserve some little credit for that? And is there *ever* any redress for the mother-bird, Padre?"

"Why, the Church teaches—" I began.

Laurence nodded. "Yes, Padre, I know all that. But it can't teach away what 's always happening here and now. At least not to the Butterfly Man and me, . . . nor yet the mother-birds, Padre. No. We want to be shown how to head off the bluejays."

We walked along in silence, his hand upon my arm. His eyes were clouded with the vision that beckoned him. As for me, I was wondering just where, and how far, that bluejay was going to lead John Flint.

It led him presently to my mother. All men learn their great lessons from women and in stress the race instinctively goes back to be taught by the mothers of it. There were long intimate talks between herself and the Butterfly Man, to which Laurence was also called. In her quiet way Madame knew by heart the whole mill district, good, bad and indifferent, for she was a woman among the women. She had supported wives parting,

from dying husbands; she had hushed the cries of frightened children, while I gave the last blessings to mothers whose feet were already on the confines of another world; she had taken dead children from frenzied women's arms. Just as the Butterfly Man had shown the country folks to Laurence, so now Madame showed them both the mill folks, the poor folks, the foreigners in a small town disdainful of them; and she did it with the added keenness of her woman's eyes and the diviner kindness of her woman's heart.

The little lady had enormous influence in the parish. And as Laurence 's plans and hopes and ambitions unfolded before her, she threw this potent influence, with all it implied, in the scale of the young lawyer's favor. They began their work at the bottom, as all great movements should begin. What struck me with astonishment was that so many quiet women seemed to be ready and waiting, as for a hoped for message, a bugle-call in the dawn, for just that which Laurence had to tell them.

"A fellow with pull behind him," said John Flint, "is what you might call a pretty fair probability. But a fellow with the women behind him is a steam-roller. There 's nothing to do but clear the road and keep from under." And when he went on his rounds among the farm houses now it was n't only the men and children he talked to. There was a message for the overworked women, the wives and daughters who had all the pains and none of the profits. Westmoreland, who had been a rather lonesome evangelist for many years, of a sudden found himself backed and supported by younger and stronger forces.

The work was done very noiselessly; there was no

outward disturbances, yet; but the women were in deadly earnest; there were far, far too many small graves in our cemetery, and they were being taught to ask why the children who filled them had n't had a fair chance? The men might smile at many things, but fathers could n't smile when mothers of lost children wanted to know why Appleboro had n't better milk and sanitation. And there, under their eyes bulked the huge red mills, and every day from the bosom of this Moloch went up the smoke of sacrifice.

Behind all this gathering of forces stood an almost unguessed figure. Not the lovely white-haired lady of the Parish House; not big Westmoreland; not handsome Laurence, nor outspoken Miss Sally Ruth with a suffrage button on her black basque; but a limping man in gray tweeds with a soft felt hat pulled down over his eyes and a butterfly net in his hand. That net was symbolic. With trained eye and sure hand the naturalist caught and classified us, put each one in his proper place.

Keener, shrewder far than any of us, no one, save I alone, guessed the part it pleased him to play. Laurence was hailed as the Joshua who was to lead all Appleboro into the promised land of better paving, better lighting, better schools, better living conditions, better city government—a better Appleboro. Behind Laurence stood the Butterfly Man.

He seldom interfered with Laurence's plans; but every now and then he laid a finger unerringly upon some weak point which, unnoticed and uncorrected, would have made those plans barren of result. He amended and suggested. I have seen him breathe upon the dry bones

of a project and make it live. It satisfied that odd sardonic twist in him to stand thus obscurely in the background and pull the strings. I think, too, that there must have been in his mind, since that morning he had watched the bluejay destroy his nest, some obscure sense of restitution. Once, in the dark, he had worked for evil. Still keeping himself hidden, it pleased him now to work for good. So there he sat in his workroom, and cast filaments here and there, and spun a web which gradually netted all Appleboro.

There was, for instance, the *Clarion*. We had had but that one newspaper in our town from time immemorial. I suppose it might have been a fairly good county paper once,—but for some years it had spluttered so feebly that one wondered how it survived at all. In spite of this, nobody in our county could get himself decently born or married, or buried, without a due and proper notice in the *Clarion*. To the country folks an obituary notice in its columns was as much a matter of form as a clergyman at one's obsequies. It simply was n't respectable to be buried without proper comment in the *Clarion*. Wherefore the paper always held open half a column for obituary notices and poetry.

These dismal productions had first brought the *Clarion* to Mr. Flint's notice. He used to snigger at sight of the paper. He said it made him sure the dead walked. He cut out all those lugubrious and home-made verses and pasted them in a big black scrapbook. He had a fashion of strolling down to the paper's office and snipping out all such notices and poems from its country exchanges. A more ghoulish and fearsome collection than he acquired I never elsewhere beheld. It

was a taste which astonished me. Sometimes he would gleefully read aloud one which particularly delighted him:

"A Christian wife and offspring seven
Mourn for John Peters who has gone to heaven.
But as for him we are sure he can weep no more,
He is happy with the lovely angels on that bright shore.*

My mother was horrified. She said, severely, that she could n't to save her life see why any mortal man should snigger because a Christian wife and children seven mourned for John Peters who had gone to heaven. The Butterfly Man looked up, meekly. And of a sudden my mother stopped short, regarded him with open mouth and eyes, and retired hastily. He resumed his pasting.

"I 've got a hankering for what you might call grave poetry," said he, pensively. "Yes, sir; an obituary like that is like an all-day sucker to me. Say, don't you reckon they make the people they 're written about feel glad they 're dead and done for good with folks that could spring something like that on a poor stiff? Wait a minute, parson—you can't afford to miss Broken-hearted Admirer:

"Miss Matty, I watched thee laid in the gloomy grave's embrace,
Where nobody can evermore press your hand or your sweet face.
When you were alive I often thought of thee with fond pride,
And meant to call around some night & ask you to be my loving Bride.
"But alas, there is a sorrowful sadness in my bosom to-day,
For I never did it & now can never really know what you would say.

Miss Matty, the time may come when I can remember thee as a brother,

* Heaven.

And lay my fond true heart at the loving feet of another.
For though just at present I can do nothing but sigh & groan,
The Holy Bible tells us it is not good for a man to dwell alone.
But even though, alas, I 'm married, my poor heart will still be true,
And oft in the lone night I will wake & weep to think she never can be you."

—"A Broken-hearted Admirer."

"Ain't that sad and sweet, though?" said the Butterfly Man admiringly. "Don't you hope those loving feet will be extra loving when Broken-hearted makes 'em a present of his fond heart, parson? Would n't it be something fierce if they stepped on it! Gee, I cried in my hat when I first read that!" Now was n't it a curious coincidence that, even as Madame, I regarded John Flint with open mouth and eyes, and retired hastily?

For some time the *Clarion* had been getting worse and worse; heaven knows how it managed to appear on time, and we expected each issue to be its last. It was n't news to Appleboro that it was on its last legs. I was not particularly interested in its threatened demise, not having John Flint's madness for its obituaries; but he watched it narrowly.

"Did you know," he remarked to Laurence, "that the poor old *Clarion* is ready to bust? It will have to write a death-notice for itself in a week or two, the editor told me this morning."

"So?" Laurence seemed as indifferent as I.

The Butterfly Man shot him a freighted glance. "Folks in this county will sort of miss the *Clarion,* he reflected. "After all, it 's the one county paper. Seems to me," he mused, "that if *I* were going in head,

neck and crop for the sweet little job of reformer-general, I 'd first off get me a grappling-hook on my town's one newspaper. Particularly when grappling-hooks were going cheap."

"Has n't Inglesby got a mortgage on it?"

"If he had would he let it die in its bed so nice and ladylike? Not much! It 'd kick out the footboard and come alive. Inglesby must be getting rusty in the joints not to reach out for the *Clarion* himself, right now. Maybe he figures it 's not worth the price. Maybe he knows this town so well he 's dead sure nobody that buys a newspaper here would have the nerve to print anything or think anything he did n't approve of. Yes, I guess that 's it."

"Which is your gentle way," cut in Laurence, "of telling me I 'd better hustle out and gather in the *Clarion* before Inglesby beats me to it, is n't it?"

"Me?" The Butterfly Man looked pained. "I 'm not telling you to buy anything. *I 'm* only thinking of the obituaries. Ask the parson. I 'm—I 'm addicted to 'em, like some people are to booze. But if you 'd promise to keep open the old corner for them, why, I might come out and *beg* you to buy the *Clarion,* now it 's going so cheap. Yep—all on account of the obituaries!" And he murmured:

> *"Our dear little Johnny was left alive*
> *To reach the interesting age of five*
> *When—"*

"That 's just about as much as I can stand of that, my son!" said I, hastily.

"The parson 's got an awful tender heart," the But-

terfly Man explained and Laurence was graceless enough to grin.

"Well, as I was about to say: I happened to think Inglesby would be brute enough to choke out my pet column, or make folks pay for it, and things like that have n't got any business to have price tags on 'em. So I got to thinking of you. You 're young and tender; also a college man; and you 're itching to wash and iron Appleboro—" he took off his glasses and wiped them delicately and deliberately.

"Did you also get to thinking," said Laurence, crisply, "that I 'm just about making my salt at present, and still you 're suggesting that I tie a dead old newspaper about my neck and jump overboard? One might fancy you hankered to add my obituary to your collection!" he finished with a touch of tartness.

The Butterfly Man smiled ever so gently.

"The *Clarion* is the county paper," he explained patiently. "It was here first. It 's been here a long time, and people are used to it. It knows by heart how they think and feel and how they want to be told they think and feel. And you ought to know Carolina people when it comes right down to prying them loose from something they 're used to!" He paused, to let that sink in.

"There 's no reason why the *Clarion* should keep on being a dead one, is there? There 's plenty room for a live daily right here and now, if it was run right. Why, this town 's blue-molded for a live paper! Look here: You go buy the *Clarion*. It won't cost you much. Believe me, you 'll find it mighty handy—power of the press, all the usual guff, you know! I sha'n't

have to worry about obituaries, but I bet you dollars to doughnuts some people will wake up some morning worrying a whole lot about editorials. Mayne—people like to think they think what they think themselves. They don't. They think what their home newspapers tell them to think. And this is your great big chance to get the town ear and shout into it good and loud."

A week or so later Mayne & Son surprised Appleboro by purchasing the moribund *Clarion*. They did n't have to go into debt for it, either. They got it for an absurdly low sum, although folks said, with sniffs, that anything paid for that rag was too much.

"Nevertheless," said the Butterfly Man to me, complacently, "that 's the little jimmy that 's going to grow up and crack some fat cribs. Watch it grow!"

I watched; but, like most others, I was rather doubtful. It was true that the *Clarion* immediately showed signs of reviving life. And that Jim Dabney, a college friend from upstate, whom Laurence had induced to accept the rather precarious position of editor and manager, wrote pleasantly as well as pungently, and so set us all to talking.

I suppose it was because it really had something to say, and that something very pertinent to our local interests and affairs, that we learned and liked to quote the *Clarion*. It made a neat appearance in new black type, and this pleased us. It had, too, a newer, clearer, louder note, which made itself heard over the whole county. The county merchants and farmers began once more to advertise in its pages, as John Flint, who watched it jealously—feeling responsible for Laurence's purchase of it—was happy to point out.

One thing, too, became more and more evident. The women were behind the *Clarion* in a solid phalanx. They knew it meant for them a voice which spoke articulately and publicly, an insistent voice which must be answered. It noticed every Mothers' Meeting, Dorcas activity, Ladies' Aid, Altar Guild, temperance gathering; spoke respectfully of the suffragists and hopefully of the "public-spirited women" of the new Civic League. And never, never, never omitted nor misplaced nor misspelled a name! The boy from up-state saw to that. He was wily as the serpent and simple as the dove. Over the local page appeared daily:

"LET'S GET TOGETHER!"

After awhile we took him at his word and tried to [illegible] and things began to happen in Appleboro.

"Here," said the Butterfly Man to me, "is where the bluejay begins to get his."

For in most Appleboro houses insistent women were asking harassed and embarrassed men certain questions concerning certain things which ladies had n't been supposed to know anything about, much less worry their heads over, since the state was a state. So determined were the women to have these questions fairly answered that they presently asked them in cold print, on the front page of the town paper. And Laurence told them. He had appalling lists and figures and names and dates. The "chiel among us takin' notes" printed them. Dabney's editorial comments were barbed.

Now there are mills in the South which do obey the state laws and regulations as to hours, working conditions, wages, sanitation, safety appliances, child labor.

But there are others which do not. Ours notoriously did n't.

John Flint and my mother had had many a conference about deplorable cases which both knew, but were powerless to change. The best they had been able to do was to tabulate such cases, with names and facts and dates, but precious little had been accomplished for the welfare of the mill people, for those who might have helped had been too busy, or perhaps unwilling, to listen or to act.

But, as Flint insisted, the new Civic League was ready and ripe to hear now what Madame had to tell. At one meeting, therefore, she took the floor and told them. When she had finished they named a committee to investigate mill conditions in Appleboro.

That work was done with a painstaking thoroughness, and the committee's final report was very unpleasant reading. But the names signed to it were so unassailable, the facts so incontrovertible, that Dabney thought best to print it in full, and later to issue it in pamphlet form. It has become a classic for this sort of thing now, and it is always quoted when similar investigations are necessary elsewhere.

It was the Butterfly Man who had taken that report and had rewritten and revised it, and clothed it with a terrible earnestness and force. Its plain words were alive. It seemed to me, when I read them that I heard . . . a bluejay's ribald screech . . . and the heart-rending and piercing cries of a little brown motherbird whose nest had been ravaged and destroyed.

Appleboro gasped, and sat up, and rubbed its eyes. That such things could be occurring here, in this pleasant

little place, in the shadow of their churches, within reach of their homes! No one dared to even question the truth of that report, however, and it went before the Grand Jury intact. The Grand Jury very promptly called Mr. Inglesby before it. They were polite to him, of course, but they did manage to ask him some very unpleasant and rather personal questions, and they did manage to impress upon him that certain things mentioned in the Civic League's report must not be allowed to reoccur. One juror—he was a planter—had even had the temerity to say out loud the ugly word "penetentiary."

Inglesby was shocked. He had n't known. He was a man of large interests and he had to leave a great deal to the discretion of superintendents and foremen. It might be, yes, he could understand how it might very well be—that his confidence had been abused. He would look into these things personally hereafter. Why, he was even now busily engaged compiling a "Book of Rules for Employees." He deplored the almost universal unrest among employees. It was a very bad sign. Very. Due almost entirely to agitators, too.

He did n't come out of that investigation without some of its slime sticking to him, and this annoyed and irritated and enraged him more than we guessed, for we had n't as yet learned the man's ambition. Also, the women kept following him up. They meant to make him comply with the strict letter of the law, if that were humanly possible.

He was far too shrewd not to recognize this; for he presently called on my mother and offered her whatever aid he could reasonably give. Her work was invalu-

able; his foremen and superintendents had instructions to give her any information she asked for, to show her anything in the mills she wished to see, and to report to headquarters any suggestions as to the—er—younger employees, she might be kind enough to make. If that were not enough she might, he suggested, call on him personally. Really, one could n't but admire the *savoir faire* of this large unctious being, so fluent, so plausible, until one happened to catch of a sudden that hard and ruthless gleam which, in spite of all his caution, would leap at times into his cold eyes.

"Is he, or is n't he, a hypocrite pure and simple, or are such men self-deceived?" mused my mother, puckering her brows. "He will do nothing, I know, that he can well avoid. But—he gave me of his own accord his personal check for fifty dollars, for that poor consumptive Shivers woman."

"She contracted her disease working in his mill and living in one of his houses on the wages he paid her," said I, "I might remind you to beware of the Greeks when they come bearing gifts."

"Proverb for proverb," said she. "The hair of the dog is good for its bite."

"Fifty dollars is n't much for a woman's life."

"Fifty dollars buys considerable comfort in the shape of milk and ice and eggs. When it 's gone—if poor Shivers is n't—I shall take the Baptist minister's wife and Miss Sally Ruth Dexter with me, and go and ask him for another check. He 'll give it."

"You 'll make him bitterly repent ever having succumbed to the temptation of appearing charitable," said I.

We were not left long in doubt that Inglesby had other methods of attack less pleasant than offering checks for charity. Its two largest advertisers simultaneously withdrew their advertisements from the *Clarion*.

"Let 's think this thing out," said John Flint to Laurence. "Cutting out ads is a bad habit. It costs good money. It should be nipped in the bud. You 've got to go after advertisers like that and make 'em see the thing in the right light. Say, parson, what 's that thing you were saying the other day—the thing I asked you to read over, remember?"

"*When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge,*" I quoted Solomon.

"That 's it, exactly. You see," he explained, "there 's always the right way out, if you 've got sense enough to find it. Only you must n't get rattled and try to make your getaway out the wrong door or the front window—that spoils things. The parson 's given you the right tip. That old chap Solomon had a great bean on him, did n't he?"

A few days later there appeared, in the space which for years had been occupied by the bigger of the two advertisements, the following pleasant notice:

People Who Disapprove of
Civic Cleanliness,
A Better Town,
Better Kiddies,
and
A Square Deal for Everybody,
Also
Disapprove of
Advertising in the Clarion.

And the space once occupied by the other advertiser was headed:

OBITUARIES

That ghastly poetry in which the soul of the Butterfly Man reveled appeared in that column thereafter. It was a conspicuous space, and the horn of rural mourning in printer's ink was exalted among us. It was not very hard to guess whose hand had directed those counter-blows.

When we met those two advertisers on the street afterward we greeted them with ironical smiles intended to enrage. They had at Inglesby's instigation been guilty of a tactical blunder of which the men behind the *Clarion* had taken fiendish and unexpected advantage. It had simply never occurred to either that a small town editor might dare to "come back." The impossible had actually happened.

I think it was this slackening of his power which alarmed Inglesby into action.

"Mr. Inglesby," said the Butterfly Man to me one night, casually, "has got him a new private secretary. He came this afternoon. His name 's Hunter—J. Howard Hunter. He dresses as if he wrote checks for a living and he looks exactly like he dresses. Honest, he 's the original he-god they use to advertise suspenders and collars and neverrips and that sort of thing in the classy magazines. I bet you Inglesby 's got to fork over a man-sized bucket of dough per, to keep *him*. There 'll be a flutter of calico in this burg from now on, for that fellow certainly knows how to wear his face. He 's gilt-edged from start to finish!"

Laurence, lounging on the steps, looked up with a smile.

"His arrival," said he, "has been duly chronicled in to-day's press. Cease speaking in parables, Bughunter, and tell us what 's on your mind."

The Butterfly Man hesitated for a moment. Then:

"Why, it 's this way," said he, slowly. "I—hear things. A bit here and there, you see, as folks tell me. I put what I 've heard together, and think it over. Of course I did n't need anybody to tell me Inglesby was sore because the *Clarion* got away from him. He expected it to die. It did n't. He thought it would n't pay expenses—well, the sheriff is n't in charge yet. And he knows the paper is growing. He 's too wise a guy to let on he 's been stung for fair, once in his life, but he don't propose to let himself in for any more body blows than he can help. So he looks about a bit and he gets him an agent—older than you, Mayne, but young enough, too—and even better looking. That agent will be everywhere pretty soon. The town will fall for him. Say, how many of you folks know what Inglesby really wants, anyhow?"

"Everything in sight," said Laurence promptly.

"And something around the corner, too. He wants to come out in the open and be IT. He intends to be a big noise in Washington. Gentlemen, Senator Inglesby! Well, why not?"

"He has n't said so, has he?" Laurence was skeptical.

"He does n't have to say so. He means to be it, and that 's very much more to the point. However, it happens that he did peep, once or twice, and it buzzed

about a bit—and that 's how I happened to catch it in my net. This Johnny he 's just got to help him is the first move. Private Secretary now. Campaign manager and press agent, later. Inglesby 's getting ready to march on to Washington. You watch him do it!''

''Never!'' said Laurence, and set his mouth.

''No?'' The Butterfly Man lifted his eyebrows. ''Well, what are you going to do about it? Fight him with your pretty little *Clarion?* It 's not big enough, though you could make it a handy sort of brick to paste him in the eye with, if you aim straight and pitch hard enough. Go up against him yourself? You 're not strong enough, either, young man, whatever you may be later on. You can prod him into firing some poor kids from his mills—but you can't make him feed 'em after he 's fired 'em, can you? And you can't keep him from becoming Senator Inglesby either, unless,'' he paused impressively, ''you can match him even with a man his money and pull can't beat. Now think.''

The young man bit his lip and frowned. The Butterfly Man watched him quizzically through his glasses.

''Don't take it so hard,'' he grinned. ''And don't let the whole salvation of South Carolina hang too heavy on your shoulders. Leave *something* to God Almighty—He managed to pull the cocky little brute through worse and tougher situations than Inglesby! Also, He ran the rest of the world for a few years before you and I got here to help Him with it.''

''You 're a cocky brute yourself,'' said Laurence, critically.

''I can afford to be, because I can open my hand this

minute and show you the button. Why, the very man you need is right in your reach! If you could get *him* to put up his name against Inglesby's, the Big Un would n't be in it."

Laurence stared. The Butterfly Man stared back at him.

"Look here," said he slowly. "You remember my nest, and what that bluejay did for it? And what you said? Well, I 've looked about a bit, and I 've seen the bluejay at work. . . . Oh, hell, I can't talk about this thing, but I 've watched the putty-faced, hollow-chested, empty-bellied kids—that don't even have guts enough left to laugh. . . . Somebody ought to sock it to that brute, on account of those kids. He ought to be headed off . . . make him feel he 's to be shoo'd outside! And I think I know the one man that can shoo him." He paused again, with his head sunk forward. This was so new a John Flint to me that I had no words. I was too lost in sheer wonder.

"The man I mean hates politics. I 've been told he has said openly it 's not a gentleman's game any more. You 've got to make him see it can be made one. You 've got to make him see it as a duty. Well, once make him see *that,* and he 'll smash Inglesby."

"You can't mean—for heaven's sake—"

"I do mean. James Eustis."

Laurence got up, and walked about, whistling.

"Good Lord!" said he, "and I never even thought of him in that light. Why . . . he 'd sweep everything clean before him!"

I am a priest. I am not even an Irish priest. Therefore politics do not interest me so keenly as they might

another. But even to my slow mind the suitability of Eustis was apparent. Of an honored name, just, sure, kind, sagacious, a builder, a teacher, a pioneer, the plainer people all over the state leaned upon his judgment. A sane shrewd man of large affairs, other able men of affairs respected and admired him. The state, knowing what he stood for, what he had accomplished for her farmers, what he meant to her agricultural interests, admired and trusted him. If Eustis wanted any gift within the power of the people to give, he had but to signify that desire. And yet, it had taken my Butterfly Man to show us this!

"Bughunter," said Laurence, respectfully. "If you ever take the notion to make me president, will you stand behind and show me how to run the United States on greased wheels?"

"I?" John Flint was genuinely astounded. "The boy 's talking in his sleep: turn over—you 're lying on your back!"

"You won't?"

"I will not!" said the Butterfly Man severely. "I have got something much more important on my hands than running states, I 'll have you know. Lord, man, I 'm getting ready some sheets that will tell pretty nearly all there is to tell about Catocala Moths!"

I remembered that sunset hour, and the pretty child of James Eustis putting in this man's hand a gray moth. I think he was remembering, too, for his eyes of a sudden melted, as if he saw again her face that was so lovely and so young. Glancing at me, he smiled fleetingly.

CHAPTER X

THE BLUEJAY

WHEN Mary Virginia was graduated, my mother sent her, to commemorate that very important and pleasant occasion, one of her few remaining treasures—a carved ivory fan which Le Brun had painted out of his heart of hearts for one of King Louis' loveliest ladies. It still exhaled, like a whiff of lost roses, something of her vanished grace.

"I have a fancy," wrote my mother to Mary Virginia, "that having been pressed against women's bosoms and held in women's hands, having been, as it were, symbols which expressed the hidden emotions of the heart, these exquisite toys have thus been enabled to gain a soul, a soul composed of sentience and of memory. I think that as they lie all the long, long years in those carved and scented boxes which are like little tombs, they remember the lights and the flowers and the perfumes, the glimmer and gleam of jewels and silks, the frothy fall of laces, the laughter and whispers and glances, the murmured word, the stifled sigh: and above all, the touch of soft lips that used to brush them lightly; and the poor things wonder a bit wistfully what has become of all that gay and lovely life, all that perished bravery and beauty that once they knew. So I am quite sure this apparently soul-

less bit of carved ivory sighs inaudibly to feel again the touch of a warm and young hand, to be held before gay and smiling eyes, to have a flower-fresh face bent over it once more.

"Accept it, then, my child, with your old friend's love. Use it in your happy hours, dream over it a little, sigh lightly; and then smile to remember that this is your Hour, that you are young, and life and love are yours. It is in such youthful and happy smiles that we whose day declines may relive for a brief and bright space our golden noon. Shall I tell you a secret, before your time to know it? *Youth alone is eternal and immortal!* How do I know? *'Et Ego in Arcadia vixi!'* "

Mary Virginia showed me that letter, long afterward, and I have inserted it here, although I suppose it really is n't at all relevant. But I shall let it stand, because it is so like my mother!

John Flint made for the schoolgirl a most wonderful tray with handles and border of hammered and twisted copper. The tray itself was covered with a layer of silvery thistle-down; and on this, hovering above flowers, some of his loveliest butterflies spread their wings. So beautifully did their frail bodies fit into this airy bed, so carefully was the work done, that you might fancy only the glass which covered them kept them from escaping.

"You will remember telling me, when you were going away to grow up," wrote John Flint, "to watch out for any big fine fellows that came by of a morning, because they 'd be messengers from you to the Parish House people. Big and little they 've come, and I 've

played like they were all of them your carriers. So you see we had word of you every single day of all these years you 've been gone! Now I 'm sending one or two of them back to you. Please play like my tray 's a million times bigger and finer and that it 's all loaded down with good messages and hopes; and believe that still it would n't be half big enough to hold all the good wishes the Parish House folks (you were right: I belong, and so does Kerry) send you to-day by the hand of your old friend,

THE BUTTERFLY MAN.

Mary Virginia showed me that letter, too, because she was so delighted with it, and so proud of it. I like its English very well, but I like its Irishness even better.

But, although she had at last finished and done with school, Mary Virginia did n't come home to us as we had hoped she would. Her mother had other plans, which failed to include little Appleboro. Why should a girl with such connections and opportunities be buried in a little town when great cities waited for just such with open and welcoming arms? The best we got then was a photograph of our girl in her graduation frock—a slim wistful Mary Virginia, with much of her dear angular youthfulness still clinging to her.

It was Mrs. Eustis herself who kept us posted, after awhile, of the girl's later triumphant progress; the sensation she created, the bored world bowing to her feet because she brought it, along with name and wealth, so fresh a spirit, so pure a beauty. There was a certain autocratic old Aunt of her mother's, a sort of awful high priestess in the inmost shrine of the sacred elect;

this Begum, delighted with her young kinswoman, ordered the rest of her world to be likewise delighted, and the world agreeing with her verdict, Mary Virginia fared very well. She was fêted, photographed, and paragraphed. Her portrait, painted by a rather obscure young man, made the painter famous. In the hands of the Begum the pretty girl blossomed into a great beauty. The photograph that presently came to us quite took our breath away, she was so regal.

"She will never, never again be at home in little Appleboro," said my mother, regretfully. "That dear, simple, passionate, eager child we used to know has gone forever—life has taken her. This beautiful creature's place is not here—*she* belongs to a world where the women wear titles and tiaras, and the men wear kings' orders. No, we could never hope to hold her any more."

"But we could love her, could we not? Perhaps even more than those fine ladies with tiaras and titles and those fine gentlemen with orders, whom your fancy conjures up for her," said I crisply, for her words stung. They found an echo in my own heart.

"Love her? Oh, but of course! But—love counts for very, very little in the world which claims Mary Virginia now, Armand. Ambition stifles him." I was silent. I knew.

As for John Flint, he looked at that photograph and turned red.

"Good Lord! To think I had nerve to send *her* a few butterflies last year . . . told *her* to play like they meant more! I somehow could n't get the notion in my head that she 'd grown up. . . . I never could think of her except as a sort of kid-angel, because I

could n't seem to bear the idea of her ever being anything else but what she was. Well . . . she 's not, any more. And I 've had the nerve to give a few insects to the Queen of Sheba!"

"Bosh!" said Laurence, sturdily. "She ought to be glad and proud to get that tray, and I 'll bet you Mary Virginia 's delighted with it. She 's her father's daughter as well as her mother's, please. As for Appleboro not being good enough for her, that 's piffle, too, p'tite Madame, and I 'm surprised at you! Her own town is good enough for any girl. If it is n't, let her just pitch in and help make it good enough, if she 's worth her salt. Not that Mary Virginia is n't scrumptious, though. Lordy, who 'd think this was the same kid that used to bump my head?"

"She turns heads now, instead of bumping them," said my mother.

"Oh, she 's not the only head-turner Appleboro can boast of!" said the young man grandly. "We 've always been long on good-lookers in Carolina, whatever else we may lack. They 're like berries in their season."

"But the berry season is short and soon over, my son: and there are seasons when there are no berries at all—except preserved ones," suggested my mother, with that swift, curious cattiness which so often astounds me in even the dearest of women.

"Dare you to tell that to the Civic League!" chortled Laurence. "I 'll grant you that Mary Virginia 's the biggest berry in the patch, at the height of a full season. But look at her getup! Don't doodads and fallals, and hen-feathers in the hair, and things twisted and tied, and a slithering train, and a clothesline length of pearls

and such, count for something? How about Claire Dexter, for instance? She may n't have a Figure like her Aunt Sally Ruth, but suppose you dolled Claire up like this? A flirt she was born and a flirt she will die, but is n't she a perfect peach? That reminds me—that ungrateful minx gave two dances rightfully mine to Mr. Howard Hunter last night. I did n't raise any ructions, because, to tell you the truth, I did n't much blame her. That fellow really knows how to dance, and the way he can convey to a girl the impression that he 's only alive on her account makes me gnash my teeth with green-and-blue envy. No wonder they all dote on him! No home complete without this handsome ornament!" he added.

My mother's lips came firmly together.

"It is a great mistake to figure Mephistopheles as a rather blasé brunette," she remarked crisply. "I am absolutely certain that if you could catch the devil without his mask you 'd find him a perfect blonde."

"Nietzsche's blonde beast, then?" suggested Laurence, amused at her manner.

"That same blonde beast is perhaps the most magnificent of animals," I put in. For alone of my household I admired immensely Mr. Inglesby's secretary. He was the only man I have ever known to whom the term 'beautiful' might be justly applied, and at the word's proper worth. Such a man as this, a two-handed sword gripped in his steel fists, a wolfskin across his broad shoulders and eagle-wings at either side the helmet that crowns his yellow hair, looks at one out of many a red, red page of the past with just such blue, dangerous, and cloudless eyes. Rolling and reek-

ing decks have known him, and falling walls, and shrieks, and flames mounting skyward, and viking sagas, and drinking-songs roared from brass throats, and terrible hymns to Odin Allfather in the midwatches of Northern nights.

He had called upon me shortly after his arrival, his ostensible reason being my work among his mill-people. I think he liked me, later. At any rate, I had seen much of him, and I was indebted to him for more than one shrewd and practical suggestion. If at times I was chilled by what seemed to me a ruthless and cold-blooded manner of viewing the whole great social question I was nevertheless forced to admire the almost mathematical perfection to which he had reduced his system.

"But you wish to deal with human beings as with figures in a sum," I objected once.

"Figures," he smiled equably, "are only stubborn—on paper. When they 're alive they 're fluid and any clever social chemist can reduce them to first principles. It 's really very simple, as all great things are: *When in doubt, reach the stomach!* There you are! That 's the universal eye-opener."

"My dear friend," he added, laughing, "don't look so horrified. *I* did n't make things as they are. Personally, I might even prefer to say, like Mr. Fox in the old story, *'It was not so. It is not so. And God forbid it should be so!'* But I can't, truthfully, and therefore—I don't. I accept what I can't help. Self-preservation, we all admit, is the first law of nature. Now I consider myself, and the class I represent, as beings much more valuable to the world than, let 's say, your factory-hands, your mill-workers, your hewers of wood

and drawers of water. Thus, should the occasion arise, I should most unhesitatingly use whatever weapons law, religion, civilization itself, put into my hands, without compunction and possibly what some cavilers might call without mercy; having at stake a very vital issue—the preservation of my kind, the protection of my class against Demos."

He spoke without heat, calmly, looking at me smilingly with his fine intelligent eyes: there was even much of truth in his frank statement of his case. Always has Dives spoken thus, law-protected, dining within; while without the doors of the sick civilization he has brought about, Lazarus lies, licked by the dogs of chance. No, this man was advocating no new theory; once, perhaps, I might have argued even thus myself, and done so with a clean conscience. This man was merely an opportunist. I knew he would never "reach their stomachs" unless he thought he had to. Indeed, since his coming, things had changed greatly at the mills, and for the better.

"The day of the great god Gouge," he had said to Inglesby, "is passing. It 's bad business to overwork and underpay your hands into a state of chronic insurrection. That means losing time and scamping work. The square deal is not socialism nor charity nor a matter of any one man's private pleasure or conscience—it 's cold hard common sense and sound scientific business. You get better results, and that 's what you 're after."

Perhaps it was because Appleboro offered, at that time, very little to amuse and interest that keen mind of his, that the Butterfly Man amused and interested Hunter so much. Or perhaps, proud as he was, even he could

not wholly escape that curious likableness which drew men to John Flint.

He was delighted with our collection. He could appreciate its scope and value, something to which all Appleboro else paid but passing heed. John Flint declared that most folks came to see our butterflies just as they would have run to see the dog-faced boy or the bearded lady—merely for something to see. But this man's appreciation and praise were both sincere and encouraging. And as he never allowed anything or anybody unusual or interesting to pass him by without at least sampling its savor, he formed the habit of strolling over to the Parish House to talk with the limping man who had come there a dying tramp, was now a scientist, with the manner and appearance of a gentleman, and who spoke at will the language of two worlds. That this once black sheep had strayed of his own will and pleasure from some notable fold Hunter did n't for a moment doubt. Like all Appleboro, he would n't have been at all surprised to see this prodigal son welcomed into the bosom of some Fifth Avenue father, and have the fatted calf dressed for him by a chef whose salary might have hired three college professors. Hunter had known one or two such black sheep in his time; he fancied himself none too shrewd in thus penetrating Flint's rather obvious secret.

My mother watched the secretary's comings and goings at the Parish House speculatively. Not even the fact that he quoted her adored La Rochefoucauld, in flawless French, softened *her* estimate.

"If he even had the semblance of a heart!" said she, regretfully. "But he is all head, that one."

Now, I am a simple man, and this cultivated and handsome man of the world delighted me. To me immured in a mill town he brought the modern world's best. He was a window, for me, which let in light.

"That great blonde!" said Madame, wonderingly. "He is so designedly fascinating I wonder you fail to see the wheels go 'round. However, let me admit that I thank God devoutly I am no longer young and susceptible. Consider the terrible power such a man might exert over an ardent and unsophisticated heart!"

It was Hunter who had brought me a slim book, making known to me a poet I had otherwise missed.

"You are sure to like Bridges," he told me, "for the sake of one verse. Have you ever thought *why* I like you, Father De Rancé? Because you amuse me. I see in you one of life's subtlest ironies: A Greek beauty-worshiper posing as a Catholic priest—in Appleboro!" He laughed. And then, with real feeling, he read in his resonant voice:

> "I love all beautiful things:
> I seek and adore them.
> God has no better praise,
> And man in his hasty days,
> Is honored for them."

When at times the secretary brought his guests to see what he pleasingly enough termed Appleboro's one claim to distinction, the Butterfly Man did the honors to the manner born. Drawer after drawer and box after box would he open, patiently answering and explaining. And indeed, I think the contents were worth coming far to see. Some of them had come to us from the ends of the earth; from China and Japan and India

and Africa and Australia, from the Antilles and Mexico and South America and the isles of the Pacific; from many and many a lonely missionary station had they been sent us. Even as our collection grew, the library covering it grew with it. But this was merely the most showy and pleasing part of the work. That which had the greatest scientific worth and interest, that upon which John Flint's value and reputation were steadily mounting, was in less lovely and more destructive forms of insect life. Beside this last, a labor calling for the most unremitting, painstaking, persevering research, observation, and intelligence, the painted beauties of his butterflies were but as precious play. For in this last he was wringing from Nature's reluctant fingers some of her dearest and most deeply hidden secrets. He was like Jacob, wrestling all night long with an unknown angel, saying sturdily:

"I will not let thee go except thou tell me thy name!" Like Jacob, he paid the price of going halt for his knowledge.

I like to think that Hunter understood the enormous value of the naturalist's work. But I fancy the silent and absorbed student himself was to his mind the most interesting specimen, the most valuable study. It amused him to try to draw his reticent host into familiar and intimate conversation. Flint was even as his name.

Oddly enough, Hunter shared the Butterfly Man's liking for that unspeakable Book of Obituaries, and I have seen him take a batch of them from his pocket as a free-will offering. I have seen him, who had all French, Russian and English literature at his fingers' ends, sit chuckling and absorbed for an hour over that fearful

collection of lugubrious verse and worse grammar; pausing every now and then to cast a speculative and curious glance at his impassive host, who, paying absolutely no attention to him, bent his whole mind, instead, upon some tiny form in a balsam slide mount under his microscope.

"Why don't you admire Mr. Hunter?" I was curious to know.

"But I do admire him." Flint was sincere.

"Then if you admire him, why don't you like him?" He reflected.

"I don't like the expression of his teeth," he admitted. "They 're too pointed. He looks like he 'd bite. I don't think he 'd care much who he bit, either; it would all depend on who got in his way."

Seeing me look at him wonderingly, he paused in his work, stretched his legs under the table, and grinned up at me.

"I 'm not saying he ought n't to put his best foot foremost," he agreed. "We 'd all do that, if we only knew how. And I 'm not saying he ought to tell on himself, or that anybody 's got any business getting under his guard. I don't hanker to know anybody's faults, or to find out what they 've got up their sleeves besides their elbows, unless I have to. Why, I 'd as soon ask a fellow to take off his patent leathers to prove he had n't got bunions, or to unbutton his collar, so I 'd be sure it was n't fastened onto a wart on the back of his neck. Personally I don't want to air anybody's bumps and bunions. It 's none of my business. I believe in collars and shoes, myself. *But* if I see signs, I can believe all by my lonesome they 've got 'em, can't I?"

"Exactly. Your deductions, my dear Sherlock, are really marvelous. A gentleman wears good shoes and clean collars—wherefore, you don't like the expression of his teeth!" said I, ironically.

"Slap me on the wrist some more, if it makes you feel good," he offered brazenly. "For he may—and I sure don't." His grin faded, the old pucker came to his forehead.

"Parson, maybe the truth is I 'm not crazy over him because people like him get people like me to seeing too plainly that things are n't fairly dealt out. Why, think a minute. That man 's got about all a man can have, has n't he? In himself, I mean. And if there 's anything more he fancies, he can reach out and get it, can't he? Well, then, some folks might get to thinking that folks like him—get more than they deserve. And some . . . don't get any more than they deserve," he finished, with grim ambiguity.

"Do you like him yourself?" he demanded, as I made no reply.

"I admire him immensely."

"Does Madame like him?" he came back.

"Madame is a woman," I said, cautiously. "Also, you are to remember that if Madame does n't, she is only one against many. All the rest of them seem to adore him."

"Oh, the rest of them!" grunted John Flint, and scowled. "Huh! If it was n't for Madame and a few more like her, I 'd say women and hens are the two plum-foolest things God has found time to make yet. If you don't believe it, watch them stand around and cackle over the first big dunghill rooster that walks on his

wings before them! There are times when I could wring their necks. Dern a fool, anyhow!" He wriggled in his chair with impatience.

"Liver," said I, outraged. "You 'd better see Dr. Westmoreland about it. When a man talks like you 're talking now, it 's just one of two things—a liver out of whack, or plain ugly jealousy."

"I do sound like I 've got a grouch, don't I?" he admitted, without shame. "Well . . . maybe it 's jealousy, and maybe it 's not. The truth is, he rubs me rather raw at times, I don't know just how or why. Maybe it 's because he 's so sure of himself. He can afford to be sure. There is n't any reason why he should n't be. And it hurts my feelings." He looked up at me, shrewdly. "He looks all right, and he sounds all right, and maybe he might be all right—but, parson, I 've got the notion that somehow he 's not!"

"Good heavens! Why, look at what the man has done for the mill folks! Whatever his motives are, the result is right there, is n't it? His works praise him in the gates!"

"Oh, sure! But he has n't played his full hand out yet, friend. You just give him time. His sort don't play to lose; they can't afford to lose; losing is the other fellow's job. Parson, see here: there are two sides to all things; one of 'em 's right and the other 's wrong, and a man 's got to choose between 'em. He can't help it. He 's got to be on one side or the other, if he 's a *man*. A neutral is a squashy It that both sides do right to kick out of the way. Now you can't do the right side any good if you 're standing flatfooted on the wrong side, can you? No; you take sides according to what 's

in you. You know good and well one side is full of near-poors, and half-ways, and real-poors—the downand-outers, the guys that never had a show, ditchers and sewercleaners and sweatshoppers and mill hands and shuckers, and overdriven mutts and starved women and kids. It 's sure one hell of a road, but there 's got to be a light somewhere about it or the best of the whole world would n't take to it for choice, would they? Yet they do! Like Jesus Christ, say. They turn down the other side cold, though it 's nicer traveling. Why, you can hog that other road in an auto, you can run down the beggars and the kids, you can even shoot up the cops that want to make you keep the speed laws. You have n't *got* any speed laws there. It 's your road. You own it, see? It 's what it is because you 've made it so, just to please yourself, and to hell with the hicks that have to leg it! But—you lose out on that side even when you think you 've won. You get exactly what you go after, but you don't get any more, and so you lose out. Why? Because you 're an egg-sucker and a nest-robber and a shrike, and a four-flusher and a piker, that 's why!

"The first road don't give you anything you can put your hands on; except that you think and hope maybe there 's that light at the end of it. But, parson, I guess if *you 're* man enough to foot it without a pay-envelope coming in on Saturdays, why, it 's plenty good enough for *me*—and Kerry. But while I 'm legging it I 'll keep a weather eye peeled for crooks. That big blonde he-god is one of 'em. You soak that in your thinking-tank: he 's one of 'em!"

"But look at what he 's doing!" said I, aghast.

"What he 's doing is *good.* Even Laurence could n't ask for more than good results, could he?"

The Butterfly Man smiled.

"Don't get stung, parson. Why, you take me, myself. Suppose, parson, you 'd been on the other side, like Hunter is, when I came along? Suppose you 'd never stopped a minute, since you were born, to think of anything or anybody but yourself and your own interests—where would *I* be to-day, parson? Suppose you had the utility-and-nothing-but-business bug biting you, like that skate 's got? Why, what do you suppose you 'd have done with little old Slippy? I was considerable good business to look at then, was n't I? No. You 've got to have something in you that will let you take gambler's chances; you 've got to be willing to bet the limit and risk your whole kitty on the one little chance that a man will come out right, if you give him a fair show, just because he *is* a man; or you can't ever hope to help just when that help 's needed. Right there is the difference between the Laurence-and-you sort and the Hunter-men," said John Flint, obstinately.

As for Laurence, he and Hunter met continually, both being in constant social demand. If Laurence did not naturally gravitate toward that bright particular set of rather rapid young people which presently formed itself about the brilliant figure of Hunter, the two did not dislike each other, though Hunter, from an older man's sureness of himself, was the more cordial of the two. I fancy each watched the other more guardedly than either would like to admit. They represented opposite interests; one might at any moment become inimical to the other. Of this, however, no faintest trace was allowed

to appear upon the calm unruffled surface of things.

If Inglesby had chosen this man by design, it had been a wise choice. For he was undoubtedly very popular, and quite deservedly so. He had unassailable connections, as we all knew. He brought a broader culture, which was not without its effect. And in spite of the fact that he represented Inglesby, there was not a door in Appleboro that was not open to him. Inglesby himself seemed a less sinister figure in the light of this younger and dazzling personality. Thus the secretary gradually removed the thorns and briars of doubts and prejudices, sowing in their stead the seeds of Inglesby's ambition and rehabilitation, in the open light of day. He knew his work was well done; he was sure of ultimate success; he had always been successful, and there had been, heretofore, no one strong enough to actively oppose him. He could therefore afford to make haste slowly. Even had he been aware of the Butterfly Man's acrid estimate of him, it must have amused him. When all was said and done, what did a Butterfly Man—even such a one as ours—amount to, in the world of Big Business? *He* had n't stocks nor bonds nor power nor pull. He had n't anything but a personality that arrested you, a setter dog, a slowly-growing name, a room full of insects in an old priest's garden. Of course Hunter would have smiled! And there was n't a soul to tell him anything of Slippy McGee!

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE GIRL GROWN UP

SUMMER stole out a-tiptoe, and October had come among the live-oaks and the pines, and touched the wide marshes and made them brown, and laid her hand upon the barrens and the cypress swamps and set them aflame with scarlet and gold. October is not sere and sorrowful with us, but a ruddy and deep-bosomed lass, a royal and free-hearted spender and giver of gifts. Asters of imperial purple, golden rod fit for kings' scepters, march along with her in ever thinning ranks; the great bindweed covers fences and clambers up dying cornstalks; and in many a covert and beside the open ditches the Gerardia swings her pink and airy bells. All down the brown roads white lady's-lace and yarrow and the stiff purple iron-weed have leaped into bloom; under its faded green coat the sugar-cane shows purple; and sumac and sassafras and gums are afire. The year's last burgeoning of butterflies riots, a tangle of rainbow coloring, dancing in the mellow sunshine. And day by day a fine still deepening haze descends veil-like over the landscape and wraps it in a vague melancholy which most sweetly invades the spirit. It is as if one waits for a poignant thing which must happen.

Upon such a perfect afternoon, I, reading my worn old breviary under our great magnolia, heard of a sud-

den a voice of pure gold call me, very softly, by my name; and looking up met eyes of almost unbelievable blue, and the smile of a mouth splendidly young and red.

I suppose the tall girl standing before me was fashionably and expensively clad; heaven knows *I* don't know what she wore, but I do know that whatever it was it became her wonderfully; and although it seemed to me very simple, and just what such a girl ought to wear, my mother says you could tell half a mile away that those clothes smacked of super-tailoring at its costliest. Hat and gloves she held in her slim white ringless hand. One thus saw her waving hair, framing her warm pale face in living ebony.

"Padre!" said she. "Oh, dear, dear, Padre!" and down she dropped lightly beside me, and cradled her knees in her arms, and looked up, with an arch and tender friendliness. That childish action, that upward glance, brought back the darling child I had so greatly loved. This was no Queen-of-Sheba, as John Flint had thought. This was not the regal young beauty whose photograph graced front pages. This was my own girl come back. And I knew I had n't lost Mary Virginia.

"I remembered this place, and I knew—I just knew in my heart—you 'd be sitting here, with your breviary in your hand. I knew just how you 'd be looking up, every now and then, smiling at things because they 're lovely and you love them. So I stole around by the back gate—and there you were!" said she, her eyes searching me. "Padre, Padre, how more than good to see you again! And I 'm sure that 's the same cassock I left you wearing. You could wear it a couple of lifetimes without getting a single spot on it—you were always such a de-

lightful old maid, Padre! Where and how is Madame? Who 's in the Guest Rooms? How is John Flint since he 's come to be a Notable? Has Miss Sally Ruth still got a Figure? How are the judge's cats, and the major's goatee? How is everything and everybody?"

"Did you know you 'd have to make room for me, Padre? Well, you will. I picked up and fairly ran away from everything and everybody, because the longing for home grew upon me intolerably. When I was in Europe, and I used to think that three thousand miles of water lay between me and Appleboro, I used to cry at nights. I hope John Flint's butterflies told him what I told them to tell him for me, when they came by! How beautiful the old place looks! Padre, you 're *thin*. Why will you work so hard? Why does n't somebody stop you? And—you 're gray, but how perfectly beautiful gray hair is, and how thick and wavy yours is, too! Gray hair was invented and intended for folks with French blood and names. Nobody else can wear it half so gracefully. Now tell me first of all you 're glad as glad can be to see me, Padre. Say you have n't forgotten me—and then you can tell me everything else!"

She paused, fanned herself with her hat, and laughed, looking up at me with her blue, blue eyes that were so heavily fringed with black.

I was so startled by her sudden appearance—as if she had walked out of my prayers, like an angel; and, above all, by that resemblance to the one long since dust and unremembered of all men's hearts save mine, that I could hardly bear to look upon her. That other one seemed to have stepped delicately out of her untimely grave; to sit once more beside me, and thus to look at

me once more with unforgotten eyes. Thou knowest, my God, before whom all hearts are bare, that I could not have loved thee so singly nor served thee without fainting, all these years, if for one faithless moment I could have forgotten her!

My mother came out of the house with a garden hat tied over her white hair, and big garden gloves on her hands. At sight of the girl she uttered a joyful shriek, flung scissors and trowel and basket aside, and rushed forward. With catlike quickness the girl leaped to her feet and the two met and fell into each other's arms. I wished when I saw the little woman's arms close so about the girl, and the look that flashed into her face, that heaven had granted her a daughter.

"Mother complained that I should at least have the decency to wire you I was coming—she said I was behaving like a child. But I wanted to walk in unannounced. I was so sure, you see, that there 'd be welcome and room for me at the Parish House."

"The little room you used to like so much is waiting for you," said my mother, happily.

"Next to yours, all in blue and white, with the Madonna of the Chair over the mantelpiece and the two china shepherdesses under her?"

"Then you shall see the new baby in the bigger Guest Room, and the crippled Polish child in the small one," said my mother. "The baby's name is Smelka Zurawawski, but she 's all the better for it—I never saw a nicer baby. And the little boy is so patient and so intelligent, and so pretty! Dr. Westmoreland thinks he can be cured, and we hope to be able to send him on to Johns Hopkins, after we 've got him in good shape.

Where is your luggage? How long may we keep you? But first of all you shall have tea and some of Clélie's cakes. Clélie has grown horribly vain of her cakes. She expects to make them in heaven some of these days, for the most exclusive of the cherubim and seraphim, and the lordliest of the principalities and powers."

Mary Virginia smiled at the pleased old servant. "I 've half a dozen gorgeous Madras head-handkerchiefs for you, Clélie, and a perfect duck of a black frock which you are positively to make up and wear now—you are *not* to save it up to be buried in!"

"No 'm, Miss Mary Virginia. I won't get buried in it. I 'll maybe get married in it," said Clélie calmly.

"Married! Clélie!" said my mother, in consternation. "Do you mean to tell me you 're planning to leave me, at this time of our lives?"

Clélie was indignant. "You think I have no mo' sense than to leave you and M'sieu Armand, for some strange nigger? Not me!"

"Who are you going to marry, Clélie?" Mary Virginia was delighted. "And had n't you better let me give you another frock? Black is hardly appropriate for a bride."

"I 'm not exactly set in my mind who he 's going to be yet, Miss Mary Virginia, but he 's got to be somebody or other. There 's been lots after me, since it got out I 'm such a grand cook and save my wages. But I 've got a sort of taste for Daddy January. He 's old, but he 's lively. He 's a real ambitious old man like that. Besides, I 'm sure of his family,—I always did like Judge Mayne and Mister Laurence, and I do like 'ristocratic connections, Miss Mary Virginia. That big nigger that

drives one of the mill trucks had the impudence to tell me he 'd give me a church wedding and pay for it himself, but I told him I was raised a Catholic; and what you think he said? He said, 'Oh, well, you 've been christened in the face already. We can dip the rest of you easy enough, and then you 'll be a real Christian, like me!' I 'd just scalded my chickens and was picking them, and I was that mad I upped and let him have that dish pan full of hot water and wet feathers in his face. 'There,' says I, 'you 're christened in the face now yourself,' I says. 'You can go and dip the rest of yourself,' says I, 'but see you do it somewhere else besides my kitchen,' I says. I don't think he 's crazy to marry me any more, and Daddy January 's sort of soothing to my feelings, besides being close to hand. Yes 'm, I guess you 'd better give me the black dress, Miss Mary Virginia, if you don't mind: it 'd come in awful handy if I had to go in mourning."

"The black dress it shall be," said Mary Virginia, gaily. She turned to my mother. "And what do you think, p'tite Madame? I 've a rare butterfly for John Flint, that an English duke gave me for him! The duke is a collector, too, and he 'd gotten some specimens from John Flint. The minute he learned I was from Appleboro he asked me all about him. He said nobody else under the sky can 'do' insects so perfectly, and that nobody except the Lord and old Henri Fabre knew as much about certain of them as John Flint does. Folks thought the duke was taken up with *me*, of course, and I was no end conceited! I had n't the ghost of an idea you and John Flint were such astonishingly learned folks, Padre! But of course if a duke thought so, I

knew I 'd better think so, too—and so I did and do! Think of a duke knowing about folks in little Appleboro! And he was such a nice old man, too. Not a bit dukey, after you knew him!"

"We come in touch with collectors everywhere," I explained.

"And so John Flint has written some sort of a book, describing the whole life history of something or other, and *you 've* done all the drawings! Is n't it lovely? Why, it sounds like something out of a pleasant book. May n't I see collector and collection in the morning? And oh, where 's Kerry?"

"Kerry," said my mother gravely, "is a most important personage. He 's John Flint's bodyguard. He does n't actually sleep in his master's bed, because he has one of his own right next it. Clélie was horrified at first. She said they 'd be eating together next, but the Butterfly Man reminded her that Kerry likes dog-biscuit and he does n't. I figure that in the order of his affections the Butterfly Man ranks Kerry first, Armand and myself next, and Laurence a close third."

"Oh, Laurence," said Mary Virginia. "I 'll be so glad to see Laurence again, if only to quarrel with him. Is he just as logical as ever? Has he given the sun a black eye with his sling-shot? My father 's always praising Laurence in his letters."

Now my mother adores Laurence. She patterns upon this model every young man she meets, and if they are not Laurence-sized she does not include them in her good graces. But she seldom lifts her voice in praise of her favorite. She is far, far too wise.

"Laurence generally looks in upon us during the eve-

ning, if he is not too busy," she said, non-committally. "You see, people are beginning to find out what a really fine lawyer Laurence is, so cases are coming to him steadily."

The trunks had arrived, and Mary Virginia changed into white, in which she glowed and sparkled like a fire opal. We three dined together, and as she became more and more animated, a pink flush stole into her rather pale cheeks and her eyes deepened and darkened. She was vividly alive. One could see why Mary Virginia was classed as a great beauty, although, strictly speaking, she was no such thing. But she had that compelling charm which one simply cannot express in words. It was there, and you felt it. She did not take your heart by storm, willynilly. You watched her, and presently you gave her your heart willingly, delighted that a creature so lovely and so unaffected and worth loving had crossed your path.

She chatted with my mother about that world which the older woman had once graced, and my mother listened without a shade to darken her smooth forehead. But I do not think I ever so keenly appreciated the many sacrifices she had made for me, until that night.

The autumn evening had grown chilly, and we had a fire in the clean-swept fireplace. The old brass dogs sparkled in the blaze, and the shadows flickered and danced on the walls, and across the faces of De Rancé portraits; the pleasant room was full of a ruddy, friendly glow. My mother sat in her low rocker, making something or other out of pink and white wools for the baby upstairs. Mary Virginia, at the old square piano, sang

for us. She had a charming voice, carefully cultivated and sweet, and she played with great feeling.

Kerry barked at the gate, as he always does when home is reached. My mother, dropping her work, ran to the window which gives upon the garden, and called. A moment later the Butterfly Man, with Laurence just back of him, and Kerry squeezing in between them, stood in the door. Mary Virginia, lips parted, eyes alight, hands outstretched, arose. The light of the whole room seemed not so much to gather upon her, as to radiate from her.

The dog reached her first. Outdoor exercise, careful diet, perfect grooming, had kept Kerry in fine shape. His age told only in an added dignity, a slower movement.

The girl went down on her knees, and hugged him. Pitache, aroused by Kerry's unwonted demonstrations, circled about them, rushing in every now and then to bestow an indiscriminate lick.

"Why, it 's Mary Virginia!" exclaimed Laurence, and helped her to her feet. The two regarded each other, mutually appraising. He towered above her, head and shoulders, and I thought with great satisfaction that, go where she would, she could nowhere find a likelier man than this same Laurence of ours. Like David in his youth, he was ruddy and of a beautiful countenance.

"Why, Laurence! What a Jack-the-Giant-killer! Mercy, how big the boy 's grown!"

"Why, Mary Virginia! What a heart-smasher! Mercy, how pretty the girl 's grown!" he came back, holding her hand and looking down at her with equally frank delight. "When I remember the pigtailed, leggy,

tonguey minx that used to fetch me clumps over the head —and then regard this beatific vision—I 'm afraid I 'll wake up and you 'll be gone!''

''If you 'll kindly give me back my hand, I might be induced to fetch you another clump or two, just to prove my reality,'' she suggested, with a delightful hint of the old truculence.

'' 'T is she! This is indeed none other than our long-lost child!'' burbled Laurence. ''Lordy, I wish I could tell her how more than good it is to see her again—and to see her as she is!''

Now all this time John Flint had stood in the doorway; and when my mother beckoned him forward, he came, I fancied, a bit unwillingly. His limp was for once painfully apparent, and whether from the day-long tramp, or from some slight indisposition, he was very pale; it showed under his deep tan.

But I was proud of him. His manner had a pleasant shyness, which was a tribute to the young girl's beauty. It had as well a simple dignity. And one was impressed by the fine and powerful physique of him, so lean and springy, so boyishly slim about the hips and waist, so deeply stamped with clean living of days in the open, of nights under the stars. The features had thinned and sharpened, and his red beard became him; the hair thinning on the temples increased the breadth of the forehead, and behind his glasses the piercing blue eyes—something like an eagle's eyes—were clear, direct, and kind. He wore his clothes well, with a sort of careless carefulness, more like an Englishman than an American, who is always welldressed, but rather gives the impression of being conscious of it.

Mary Virginia's lips parted, her eyes widened, for a fraction of a second. But if, remembering him as she had first seen and known him, she was astonished to find him as he was now, she gave no further outward sign. Instead, she gave him her hand as to an equal, and in a few gracious words let him know that she knew and was proud of what he had done and what he was yet to do. She repeated, too, with a pretty air of personal triumph, the old nobleman's praise. Indeed, it had been he who had told her of the book, which he had lately purchased and studied. she said. And oh, had n't she just *swelled* with pride! She had been that conceited!

"You don't know how much obliged to you I should be, for if he had n't accidentally learned I was from Appleboro, the town in which dwelt his most greatly prized correspondent—that 's what he said, Mr. Flint! —why, I 'm sure he would n't have noticed me any more than he noticed any other girl—which is, not at all; he being a toplofty and serious Personage addicted to people who do things and write things, particularly things about things that crawl and fly. And if he had n't noticed me so pointedly—he actually came to see us!—why, I should n't have had such a perfectly gorgeous time. It was a great feather in my cap," she crowed. "Everybody envied me desperately!" She managed to make us understand that this was really a compliment to the Butterfly Man, not to herself.

"If the little book served you for one minute it was well worth the four years it took me to gather the materials together and write it," said he, pleasantly. And even the courtly Hunter could n't have said it with a manlier grace.

"Mary Virginia," said Laurence slyly, "when you 've had your fill of bugs, make him show you the Book of Obituaries. He thereby stands revealed in his true colors. Why, he made me buy the old *Clarion* and hire Jim Dabney to run it, so his supply of mortuary gems should n't be cut off untimely. To-day he culled this one:

Phileola dear, we cry because thou hast gone and left us,
But well we know it is a merciful heaven which has bereft us.
We tried five doctors and everything else we knew of you to save,
But alas, nothing did you any good, and to-day you are in your grave!

He 's got it in his pocket now. Dabney calls him Mister Bones," grinned Laurence.

My mother looked profoundly uncomfortable. The Butterfly Man reddened guiltily under her reproachful glance, but Mary Virginia giggled irrepressibly.

"I choose the Book of Obituaries first!" said she promptly, with dancing eyes. Flint drew a breath of relief.

He sat by silently enough, while Laurence and Madame and Mary Virginia talked of everything under heaven. His whole manner was that of an amused, tolerant, sympathetic listener—a manner which spurs conversation to its happiest and best. Not for nothing had Major Cartwright called him the most discriminatin' listener in Carolina.

"Oh, by the way, Flint! Hunter came by this morning to see Dabney. He is going to give a series of Plain Talks to Workingmen this winter, and of course he wants the *Clarion* to cover them. What do you think, Padre?"

"I think they will be eminently sensible talks and well worth listening to," said I promptly.

The Butterfly Man smiled crookedly, and shot me a freighted glance.

"Of course," said Laurence, easily. "Where 's your father these days, Mary Virginia?"

"He was at the plantation this morning, but he 'll be here to-morrow, because I wired him to come. I 've just got to have him for awhile, business or no business."

"You did me a favor, then. I want to see him, too."

"Anything very particular?"

"Politics."

"How silly! You know very well he never meddles with politics, thank goodness! He thinks he has something better to do."

"That 's just what I want to see him about," said Laurence.

"You mentioned a—a Mr. Hunter." Mary Virginia spoke after a short pause. "This is the first time I 've heard of any Mr. Hunter in Appleboro. Who is Mr. Hunter?"

"Inglesby's right-bower, and the king-card of the pack," said Laurence promptly.

"One of them which set up golden images in high places and make all Israel for to sin," said my mother. "*That 's* what Howard Hunter is!"

"Oh, . . . Howard Hunter!" said she. "What sort of a person may he be? And what is he doing here in Appleboro?"

We told her according to our lights. Only the Butterfly Man sat silent and imperturbable.

"And you 'll meet him everywhere," finished my

mother. "He 's everything a man should be to the naked eye, and I sincerely hope," she added piously, "that you won't like him at all."

Mary Virginia leaned back in her chair, and glanced thoughtfully down at the slim ringless hands clasped in her white lap.

"No," said she, as if to herself. "There could n't by any chance be two such men in this one world. That is he, himself." And she lifted her head, and glanced at my mother, with a level and proud look. "I think I have met this Mr. Hunter," said she, smiling curiously. "And if that is true, your hope is realized, p'tite Madame. I shan't."

CHAPTER XII

JOHN FLINT, GENTLEMAN

ALMOST up to Christmas the weather had been so mild and warm that folks lived out of doors. Girls clothed like the angels in white raiment fluttered about and blessed the old streets with their fresh and rosy faces. In the bright sunshine the flowers seemed to have lost all thought of winter; they forgot to fade; and roses rioted in every garden as if it were still summer. Nobody but the Butterfly Man grumbled at this springlike balminess, and he only because he was impatient to resume experiments carried over from year to year—the effect of varying degrees of natural cold upon the colors of butterflies whose chrysalids were exposed to it. He generally used the chrysalids of the Papilio Turnus, whose females are dimorphic, that is, having two distinct forms. He did not care to resort to artificial freezing, preferring to allow Nature herself to work for him. And the jade repaid him, as usual, by showing him what she could do but refusing to divulge the moving why she did it. She gave him for his pains sometimes a light, and sometimes a dark butterfly, with different degrees of blurred or enlarged and vivid markings, from chrysalids subjected to exactly the same amount of exposure.

The Butterfly Man was burning to complete his notes,

already assuming the proportions of that very exact and valuable book they were afterward to become. He chafed at the enforced delay, and wished himself at the North Pole.

In the meantime, having nothing else on hand just then, it occurred to him to put some of these notes, covering the most interesting and curious of the experiments, into papers which the general run of folks might like to read. Dabney had been after him for some time to do some such work as this for the *Clarion*.

I think Flint himself was genuinely surprised when he read over those enchanting papers, though he did not then and never has learned to appreciate their unique charm and value. Instead, however, of sending them to Dabney, he thought they might possibly interest a somewhat wider public, and with great diffidence, and some misgivings, he sent one or two of them to certain of the better known magazines. They did not come back. He received checks instead, and a request for more.

Now the book and the several monographs he had already gotten out had been, although very interesting, strictly scientific; they could appeal only to students and scholars. But these papers were entirely different. Scientific enough, very clear and lucid and most quaintly flavored with what Laurence called Flintishness, they were so well received, and the response of the reading public to this fresh and new presentment of an ever-fascinating subject was so immediate and so hearty, that the Butterfly Man found himself unexpectedly confronting a demand he was hard put to it to supply.

He was very much more modest about this achieve-

ment than we were. My mother's pride was delicious to witness. You see, it also invested *me* with a very far-sighted wisdom! Here was it proven to all that Father De Rancé had been right in holding fast to the man who had come to him in such sorry plight.

I suppose it was this which moved Madame to take the step she had long been contemplating. Knowing her Butterfly Man, she began with infinite wile.

"Armand," said she, one bright morning in early November, "*I* am going to entertain, too—everybody else has done so, and now it 's my turn. The weather is so ideal, and my garden so gorgeous with all those chrysanthemums and salvias and geraniums and roses, that it would be sinful not to take advantage of such conditions.

"I have saved enough out of my house-money to meet the expenses—and I am *not* going to be charitable and do my Christian duty with that money! I 'm going to entertain. I really owe that much attention to Mary Virginia." She laid her hand on my arm. "I must see John Flint; go over to his rooms, and bring him back with you."

I thought she merely needed his help and counsel, for she is always consulting him; she considers that whatever barque is steered by John Flint must needs come home to harbor. He obeyed her summons with alacrity, for it delights him to assist Madame. He did not know what fate overshadowed him!

My mother sat in her low rocker, a lace apron lending piquancy to her appearance. She looked unusually pretty—there was n't a girl in Appleboro who did n't envy Madame De Rancé's complexion.

"Well," said the Butterfly Man cheerfully, unconsciously falling under the spell of this feminine charm, "the Padre tells me there 's a party in the wind. Good! Now what am I to do? How am I to help you out?"

My mother leaned forward and compelled him to meet direct her eyes that were friendly and clear and candid as a child's.

"Mr. Flint," said she artlessly, ignoring his questions, "Mr. Flint, you 've been with Armand and me quite a long time now, have you not?"

"A couple of lifetimes," said he, wonderingly.

"A couple of lifetimes," she mused, still holding his eyes, "is a fairly long time. Long enough, at least, to know and to be known, should n't you think?"

He awaited enlightenment. He never asks unnecessary questions.

"I am going," said my mother, with apparent irrelevance, "to entertain in honor of Mary Virginia Eustis. I shall probably have all Appleboro here. I sent for you to explain that you and Armand are to be present, too."

The Butterfly Man almost fell out of his chair.

"Me?" he gasped.

"You," with deadly softness. "You."

Horror and anguish encompassed him. Perspiration appeared on his forehead, and he gripped the arms of his chair as one bracing himself for torture. He looked at the little lady with the terror of one to whom the dentist has just said: "That jaw tooth must come out at once. Open your mouth wider, please, so I can get a grip!"

My mother regarded this painful emotion heartlessly enough. She said coolly:

"You don't need to look as if I were sentencing you to be hanged before sundown. I am merely inviting you to be present at a very pleasant affair." But the Butterfly Man, with his mouth open, wagged his head feebly.

"And this," said my mother, turning the screw again, "is but the beginning. After this, I shall manage it so that all invitations to the Parish House include Mr. John Flint. There is no reason under heaven why you should occupy what one might call an ambiguous position. I am determined, too, that you shall no longer rush away to the woods like a scared savage, the minute more than one or two ladies appear. No, nor have Armand hurrying away as quickly as he can, either, to bury or to marry somebody. All feminine Appleboro shall be here at once, and you two shall be here at the same time!

"John Flint, regard me: if the finest butterfly that ever crawled a caterpillar on this earth has the impertinence to fly by my garden the afternoon I 'm entertaining for Mary Virginia, it can fly, but you shan't.

"Armand: nobody respects Holy Orders more than I do: but there is n't anybody alive going to get born or baptized or married or buried, or anything else, in this parish, on that one afternoon. If they are selfish enough to do it anyhow, why, they can do it without your assistance. You are going to stay home with me: both of you."

"My *dear* mother—"

"Good Lord! Madame—"

"I am not to be dearmothered nor goodlorded! Heaven knows I ask little enough of either of you. *I*

am at *your* beck and call, every day in the year. It does seem to me that when I wish to be civilized, and return for once some of the attentions I have received from my friends, I might at least depend upon you two for one little afternoon!" Could anything be more artfully unanswerable?

"Oh, but Madame—" began Flint, horrified by such an insinuation as his unwillingness to do anything at any time for this adored lady.

"Particularly," continued my mother, inexorably, "when I have your best interest at heart, too, John Flint! Monsieur the Butterfly Man, you will please to remember that you are a member of my household. You are almost like a son to me. You are the apple of that foolish Armand's eye—do not look so astounded, it is true! Also, you will have a great name some of these days. So far, so good. But—you are making the grievous error of shunning society, particularly the society of women. This is wrong; it makes for queerness, it evolves the 'crank,' it spoils many an otherwise very nice man."

Flint sagged in his chair, and clasped and unclasped his hands, which trembled visibly. Madame regarded him without pity, with even a touch of scorn.

"Yes, it is indeed high time to reclaim you!" she decided, with the fearsome zeal of the female reformer of a man. "You silly man, you! Have you no proper pride? Have you absolutely no idea of your own worth? Well, then, if you have n't, *I* have. You *shall* take your place and play your part!"

"But," said Flint, and a gleam of hope irradiated his stricken face, "but I don't think I 've got the clothes to

wear to parties. And I really can't afford to spend any more money right now, either. I spent a lot on that old 1797 Abbot & Smith's 'Natural History of the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia.' It cost like the dickens, although I really got it for about half what it 's worth. I had to take it when I got the chance, and I 'd be willing to wear gunny-sacking for a year to pay for those plates! I need them: I want them. But I don't need a party. I don't want a party! Madame, don't, don't make me go to any party!"

"Nonsense!" said my mother. "Clothes, indeed! I should n't worry about clothes, if I were you, John Flint. You came into this world knowing exactly what to wear and how to wear it. Why, you have an air! That is a very great mercy, let me tell you, and one not always vouchsafed to the deserving, either."

"I have a cage full of grubs—most awfully particular grubs, and they 've got to be watched like a sick kid with the—with the whatever it is sick kids have, anyhow. Why, if I were to leave those grubs one whole afternoon—"

"You just let me see a single solitary grub have the temerity to hatch himself out that one afternoon, that 's all! They have all the rest of their nasty little lives to hatch out!"

"Besides, there 's a boy lives about five miles from here, and he 's likely to bring me word any minute about something I simply have to have—"

"I want to see that boy!" She pointed her small forefinger at him, with the effect of a pistol leveled at his head.

"You are coming to my affair!" said she, sternly.

"If you have no regard whatsoever for Mary Virginia and me, you shall have some for yourself; if you have none for yourself, then you shall have some for *us!*"

This took the last puff of wind from the Butterfly Man's sails.

"All right!" he gulped, and committed himself irremediably. "I—I 'll be right here. You say so, and of course I 've got to!"

"Of course you will," said my mother, smiling at him charmingly. "I knew I had only to present the matter in its proper light, and you 'd see it at once. You are so sensible, John Flint. It 's such a comfort, when the gentlemen of one's household are so amenable to reason, and so ready to stand by one!"

Having said her say, and gotten her way—as she was perfectly sure she would—Madame left the gentlemen of her household to their own reflections and devices.

"Parson!" The Butterfly Man seemed to come out of a trance. "Remember the day you made me let a caterpillar crawl up my hand?"

"Yes, my son."

"Parson, there 's a horrible big teaparty crawling up my pants' leg this minute!"

"Just keep still," I could n't help laughing at him, "and it will come down after awhile without biting you. Remember, you got used to the others in no time."

"Some of 'em stung like the very devil," he reminded me, darkly.

"Oh, but those were the hairy fellows. This is a stingless, hairless, afternoon party! It won't hurt you at all!"

"It 's walking up my pants' leg, just the same. And

I 'm scared of it: I 'm horrible scared of it! My God! *Me!* At a jane-junket! . . . all the thin ones diked out with doodads where the bones come through . . . stoking like sailors on shore leave . . . all the fat ones grouchy about their shapes and thinking it 's their souls. . . ." And he broke out, in a fluttering falsetto:

" 'Oh, Mr. Flint, do please let us see your lovely butterflies! Are n't they just too perfectly sweet for anything! I wonder why they don't trim hats with butterflies? Do you know *all* their names, you awfully clever man? Do *they* know their names, too, Mr. Flint? Butterflies must be so very interesting! And so decorative, particularly on china and house linen! How you have the heart to kill them, I can't imagine. Just think of taking the poor mother-butterflies away from the dear little baby-ones!' . . . —and me having to stand there and behave like a perfect gentleman!" He looked at me, scowling:

"Now, you look here: I can stand 'em single-file, but if I 'm made to face 'em in squads, why, you blame nobody but yourself if I foam at the mouth and chase myself in a circle and snap at legs, you hear me?"

"I hear you," said I, coldly. "You did n't get your orders from *me*. *I* think your proper place is in the woods. You go tell Madame what you 've just told me —or should you like me to warn her that you 're subject to rabies?"

"For the love of Mike, parson! Have a heart! Have n't I got troubles enough?" he asked bitterly.

"You are behaving more like an unspanked brat than a grown man."

"I was n't weaned on teaparties," said he, sulkily,

"and it ought n't to be expected I can swallow 'em at sight without making a face and—"

"Whining," I finished for him. And I added, with a reminiscent air: "Rule 1: Can the Squeal!"

He glared at me, but as I met the glare unruffled, his lip presently twisted into a grin of desperate humor. His shoulders squared.

"All right," said he, resignedly. And after an interval of dejected silence, he remarked: "I 've sort of got a glimmer of how Madame feels about this. She generally knows what 's what, Madame does, and I have n't seen her make a mistake yet. If she thinks it 's my turn to come on in and take a hand in any game she 's playing, why, I guess I 'd better play up to her lead the best I know how . . . and trust God to slip me over an ace or two when I need them. You tell her she can depend on me not to fall down on her . . . and Miss Eustis."

"No need to tell Madame what she already knows."

"Huh!" With his chin in his hand and his head bent, he stared out over the autumn garden with eyes which did not see its flaming flowers. Of a sudden his shoulders twitched; he laughed aloud.

"What are you laughing at?" I was startled out of a revery of my own.

"Everything," said the Butterfly Man, succinctly, and stood up and shook himself. "And everybody. And me in particular. *Me!* Oh, good Lord, think of *Me!*" He whistled for Kerry, and took himself off. I watched him walk down the street, and saw Judge Mayne's familiar greeting; and Major Cartwright stop him, and with his hand on the Butterfly Man 's arm, walk off with

him. Major Cartwright had kept George Inglesby out of two coveted clubs, for all his wealth; he was stiff as the proverbial poker to Howard Hunter, for all that gentleman's impeccable connections; he met John Flint, not as through a glass darkly, but face to face.

My mother, coming out of the house with her cherished manuscript cookbook in her hand, looked after them thoughtfully:

"Yes; it is high time for that man to know his proper place!"

"And does he not?"

"Oh, I suppose so, Armand. In a man's way, though —not a woman's. It 's the woman's way that really matters, you see. When women acknowledge that man socially—and I mean it to happen—his light won't be hidden under a bushel basket. He will climb up into his candlestick and shine."

That sense of bewilderment which at times overwhelmed me when the case of John Flint pressed hard, overtook me now, with its ironic humor. As he himself had expressed it, I felt myself caught by a Something too big to withstand. I was afraid to do anything, to say anything, for or against, this launching of his barque upon the social sea. I felt that the affair had been once more lifted out of my power; that my serving now was but to stand and wait.

And in the meanwhile my mother, with her own hands, washed and darned the priceless old lace that was her chiefest pride; had something done to a frock; got out her sacredest treasures of linen and china and silver; requisitioned the Mayne and the Dexter spoons as well; had the Parish House scoured until it glittered; did

everything to the garden but wash and iron it; spent momentous and odorous hours with Clélie over the making of toothsome delights; and on a golden afternoon gave a tea on the flower-decked verandahs and in the glorious garden, to which all Appleboro, in its best bib and tucker, came as one. And there, in the heart and center of it, cool, calm, correct, collected, hiding whatever mortal qualms he might have felt under a demeanor as perfect as Hunter's own, apparently at home and at ease, behold the Butterfly Man!

Everybody seemed to know him. Everybody had something pleasant to say to him. Folks simply accepted him at sight as one of themselves. And the Butterfly Man accepted them quite as simply, with no faintest trace of embarrassment.

If Appleboro had cherished the legend that this was a prodigal well on his way home, that afternoon settled it for them into a positive fact. His manner was perfect. It was as if one saw the fine and beautiful grain of a piece of rare wood come out as the varnish that disfigured it was removed. Here was no veneer to scratch and crack at a touch, but the solid, rare thing itself. My mother had been right, as always. John Flint stepped into his proper place. Appleboro was acknowledging it officially.

The garden was full of laughter and chatter and perfumes, and women in pretty clothes, and young girls dainty as flowers, and the smiling faces of men. But I am no longer of the party age. I stole away to a favorite haunt of mine at the back of the garden, behind the spireas and the holly tree, where there is a dilapidated old seat we have been threatening to remove any time this

five years. Here, some time later, the Butterfly Man himself came stealthily, and seemed embarrassed to find the place preëmpted.

"Well," said I, making room for him beside me, "it is n't so bad after all, is it?"

"No. I 'm glad I was let in for it," he admitted frankly, "though I 'd hate to have to come to parties for a living. Still, this afternoon has nailed down a thought that 's been buzzing around loose in my mind this long time. It 's this: people are n't anything but people, after all. Men and women and kids, the best and the worst of 'em, they 're nothing but people, the same as everybody else. No, I 'll never be scared to meet anybody, after this. *I 'm* people, too!"

"The same as everybody else."

"The same as everybody else," he repeated, soberly. "Not but what there 's lots of difference between folks. And there are things it 's good to know, too . . . things that women like Madame . . . and Miss Mary Virginia Eustis . . . expect a man to know, if they 're not going to be ashamed of him." He thought about this awhile, then:

"I tell you what, father," he remarked, tentatively, "it must be a mighty fine thing to know you 've got the right address written on you, good and plain, and the right number of stamps, and the sender's name somewhere on a corner, to keep you from going astray or to the Dead Letter Office; and not to be scrawled in lead-pencil, and misspelt, and finger-smutched, and with a couple of postage-due stamps stuck on you crooked, and the Lord only knows who and where from."

"Why, yes," said I, "that 's true, and one does well

to consider it. But the main thing, the really important thing, is the letter itself—what 's written inside, John Flint."

"But what 's written inside would n't be any the worse if it was written clearer and better, and the outside was cleaner and on nice paper? And in pen-and-ink, not lead-pencil scratches?" he insisted earnestly.

"Of course not."

"That 's what I 've been thinking lately, father. Somehow, I always did like things to have some class to 'em. I remember how I used to lean against the restaurant windows when I was a kid, and watch the folks inside, how they dressed and acted, and the way the nicest of 'em handled table-tools. They were n't swells, of course, and plenty of 'em made plenty of mistakes—I 've seen stunts done with a common table-knife that had the best of the sword-swallowing gents skinned a mile—but I was n't a fool, and I learned some. Then when I—er—began to make real money (parson, I made it in wads and gobs and lumps those days!) why, I got me the real thing in glad rags from the real thing in tailors, and I used to blow a queen that 'd been a swell herself once, to the joint where the gilt-edged bunch eat and show off their clothes and the rest of themselves. My jane looked the part to the life, I had the kale and the clothes and was chesty as a head-waiter, being considerably stuck on yours truly along about then, so we put it over. I had the chance to get hep to the last word in clothes and manners; that 's what I 'd gone for, though I did n't tell that to the skirt I was buying the eats for. And it was good business, too, for more than once when some precinct bonehead that pipe-dreamed

he was a detective was pussy-catting some cold rat-hole, there was me vanbibbering in the white light at the swellest joints in little old New York! Funny, was n't it? And handy! And I was learning, too—learning things worth good money to know. I saw that the best sort did n't make any noise about anything. They went about their business, whatever it was, easy-easy, same as me in my line. But, parson, though I 'd got hep to the outside, and had sense enough to copy what I 'd seen, I was n't wise to the inside difference—the things that make the best what it is, I mean—because I 'd never been close enough to find out that there 's more to it than looks and duds and manners. It took the Parish House people to soak that into me. People are n't anything but people—but the best are—well, different."

We fell silent; a happy silence, into which, as from another planet, there drifted light laughter, and sweet gay voices of girls, and the stir and rustle of many people moving about. On the Mayne fence the judge's black Panch sat, neck outstretched, emerald eyes aslant, ears cocked uneasily at these unwonted noises. At a little distance a bluejay watched him with bright malevolent eyes, every now and then screaming insults at the whole tribe of cats, and black Panch in particular. Flint snapped his fingers, and Panch, with a spring, was off the fence and on his friend's knees. It seemed to me it had only needed the sleek beastie to make that hour perfect;—for cats in the highest degree make for a sense of homely, friendly intimacy. Flint, feeling this, stroked the black head contentedly. Panch purred for the three of us.

Into this presently broke Miss Sally Ruth Dexter, and

bore down on John Flint like a frigate with all sails spread. At sight of her Panch spat and fled, and took the happy spell with him.

"Here you are, cuddling that old pirate of a black cat!" said she, briskly. "I told Madame you 'd be mooning about somewhere. Here 's some cocoanut cake for you both. Father, Madame 's been looking for you. Did you know," she sank her voice to a piercing whisper, "that George Inglesby 's here? Well, he is! He 's talking to Mary Virginia Eustis, this very minute! They do say he 's running after Mary Virginia, and I 'm sure I would n't be surprised, for if ever a mortal man had the effrontery of Satan that man 's George Inglesby! I must admit he 's improved since Mr. Hunter took him in hand. He 's not nearly so stout and red-faced, and he has n't half the jowl, though Lord knows he 'll have to get rid of a few tons more of his blubber" (Miss Sally Ruth has a free and fetterless tongue) "if he wants to look *human.* As I say, what 's the use of being a millionaire if you 've got a shape like a rain-barrel? I often tell myself, 'Maybe you have n't been given such a lot of this world's goods as some, Sally Ruth Dexter, but you can thank your sweet Redeemer you 've at least got a Figure!"

The Butterfly Man cast a speculative eye over her generous proportions.

"Yes 'm, you certainly have a whole lot to be thankful for," he agreed, so wholeheartedly that Miss Sally Ruth laughed.

"Get along with you, you impudent fellow!" said she, in high good humor. "Go and look at that old scamp of an Inglesby making eyes at a girl young enough to

be his daughter! I heard this morning that Mr. Hunter has orders to get him, by hook or crook, an invitation to anything Mary Virginia goes to. I declare, it 's scandalous! Come to think of it, though, I never saw any man yet, no matter how old or ugly or outrageous he might be, who did n't really believe he stood a perfectly good chance to win the affections of the handsomest young woman alive! If you ask *me, I* think George Inglesby had better join the church and get himself ready to meet his God, instead of gallivanting around girls. If he feels he has to gallivant, why don't he pick out somebody nearer his own age?"

"Why should you make him choose mutton when he wants lamb?" asked the Butterfly Man, unexpectedly.

"Because he 's an old bellwether, that 's why!" snapped Miss Sally Ruth, scandalized. "I wonder at Annabelle Eustis allowing him to come near Mary Virginia, millionaire or no millionaire. I bet you James Eustis will have something to say, if Mary Virginia herself does n't!" And she sailed off again, leaving us, as the saying is, with a bug in the ear.

"Now what in the name of heaven," I wondered, "can Miss Sally Ruth mean? Mary Virginia . . . Inglesby. . . . The thing 's sacrilegious."

The Butterfly Man rose abruptly. "Suppose we stroll about a bit?" he suggested.

"I thought," said my mother, when we approached her, "that you had disobeyed orders, and run away!"

"We were afraid to," said John Flint. "We knew you 'd make us go to bed without supper."

"Did you know," said my mother, hurriedly, for Clélie was making signs to her, "that George Inglesby is

here? The invitation was merely perfunctory, just sent along with Mr. Hunter's. I never dreamed the man would accept it. You can't imagine how astonished I was when he presented himself!"

A few moments later, the Butterfly Man said in a low voice: "Look yonder!" And turning, I saw Hunter. He was for the moment alone, and stood with his head bent slightly forward, his bright cold glance intent upon the two persons approaching—Mary Virginia and George Inglesby. His white teeth showed in a smile. I remembered, disagreeably, Flint's "I don't like the expression of his teeth: he looks like he 'd bite."

Until that afternoon I had not seen the secretary for some time, for he had been kept unusually busy. Those eminently sensible talks to the mill workers had been well received, and were to be followed by others along the same line. He had done even more: he had induced the owners to recognize the men's Union, and all future complaints and demands were to be submitted to arbitration. Inglesby had undoubtedly gained ground enormously by that move. Hunter had done well. And yet —catching that sharp-toothed smile, I felt my faith in him for the first time shaken by one of those unaccountable uprushes of intuition which perplex and disturb.

I knew, too, that Laurence had had several long and serious conferences with Eustis, and I could well imagine the arguments he had brought to bear, the rousing of a sense of duty, and of state pride.

Eustis was obstinate. He had many interests. He was a very, very busy man. He did n't want to be a Senator; he wanted to be let alone to attend to his own business in his own way. But, insisted Laurence, when

a thing must be done, and you can do it in a manner which benefits all and injures none; when your own people ask you to do it for them, isn't *that* your business?

A cold damning resumé of Inglesby's entire career made Eustis hesitate. A vivid picture of what the state might expect at Inglesby's hands roused him to just anger. Such as this fellow represent Carolina? Never! When Inglesby's name should be put up, Eustis unwillingly agreed to oppose him.

And here was Inglesby, in my garden, making himself agreeable to Eustis's daughter! He was so plainly desirous to please her, that it troubled me, although it made his secretary smile.

The Mary Virginia walking beside Inglesby was not the Mary Virginia *we* knew: this was the regal one, the great beauty. Her whole manner was subtly charged with a sort of arrogant hauteur; her fairness itself changed, tinged with pride as with an inward fire, until she glowed with a cold, jewel-like brightness, hard and clear. Her very skirts rustled pridefully. Her glance at the man beside her was insulting in its disdainful indifference.

What would have saddened a nobler spirit enchanted Inglesby. He was dazzled by her. Her interest in what he was saying was coolly impersonal, the fixed habit of trained politeness. He could even surmise that she was mentally yawning behind her hand. When she looked at him her eyes under her level brows held a certain scornfulness. And this, too, delighted him. He groveled to it. His red face glowed with pleasure; he swelled with a pride very different from Mary Virginia's. I thought

he had an upholstered look in his glossy clothes, reminding me unpleasantly of horsehair furniture.

"He looks like a day coach in July," growled the Butterfly Man in my ear, disgustedly.

Inglesby at this moment perceived Hunter and beamed upon him, as well he might! Who but this priceless secretary had pulled the strings which set him beside this glorious creature, in the Parish House garden? He turned to the girl, with heavy jauntiness:

"My good right hand, Miss Eustis, I assure you!" he beamed. "But I am sure you two need no dissertations upon each other's merits!"

"None whatever," said Miss Eustis, and looked over Mr. Hunter's head.

"Oh, Miss Eustis and I are really old acquaintances!" smiled the secretary. "We know each other very well indeed."

Mary Virginia made no reply. Instead, she looked about her, indifferently enough, until her glance encountered the Butterfly Man's. What he saw in her's I do not know. But he instantly moved toward her, and swept me with him.

"Father De Rancé and I," said he, easily, "have n't had chance to speak to you all afternoon, Miss Eustis." He acknowledged Hunter's friendly greeting pleasantly enough.

"And I 've been looking for you both." The hauteur faded from the young face. Our own Mary Virginia appeared, changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Inglesby favored me with condescending effusiveness. Flint got off with a smirking stare.

"And this," said Inglesby in the sort of voice some

people use in addressing strange children to whom they desire to be patronizingly nice and don't know how, "this is the Butterfly Man!" Out came the jovial smile in its full deadliness. The Butterfly Man's lips drew back from his teeth and his eyes narrowed to gimlet points behind his glasses. "I have heard of you from Mr. Hunter. And so you collect butterflies! Very interesting and active occupation for any one that—ahem! likes that sort of thing. Very."

"He collects obituaries, too," said Hunter, immensely amused. "You must n't overlook the obituaries, Mr. Inglesby."

Mr. Inglesby favored the collector of butterflies *and* obituaries with another speculative, piglike stare. You could see the thought behind it: "Trifling sort of fellow! Idiotic! Very." Aloud he merely mumbled:

"Singular taste. Very. Collecting obituaries, eh?"

"Fascinating things to collect. Very," said the Butterfly Man, sweetly. "Not to be laughed at. I might add yours to 'em, too, you know, some of these fine days!"

"Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed!" murmured Hunter. Mr. Inglesby, however, was visibly ruffled and annoyed. Who was this fellow braying of obituaries as if he, Inglesby, were on the highroad to oblivion already, when he was, in reality, still quite a young man? And right before Miss Eustis! He turned purple.

"My obituary?" he spluttered. "*Mine?* Mine?"

"Sure, if it 's worth while," said the Butterfly Man, amiably. Mary Virginia barely suppressed a smile.

"Madame would like to see you, Miss Eustis," he told her.

Mary Virginia, bowing distantly to the millionaire and his secretary, walked off with him, I following.

Once free of them, her spirits rose soaringly.

"It 's been a lovely afternoon, and I 've enjoyed it all—except Mr. Inglesby. I don't *like* Mr. Inglesby, Padre. He 's amusing enough, I suppose, at times, but one can't seem to get rid of him—he 's a perfect Old Man of the Sea," she told us, confidentially. "And you can't imagine how detestably youthful he is, Mr. Flint! He told me half a dozen times this afternoon that after all, years don't matter—it is the heart which is young. And he takes cold tubs and is proud of himself, and plays golf—for exercise!" The scorn of the lithe and limber young was in her voice.

"What 's the use of being a millionaire, if you have a shape like the rainbarrel?" I quoted pensively.

Later that night, when "the lights were fled, the garlands dead, and all but me departed," I went over for my usual last half-hour with John Flint. Very often we have nothing whatever to say, and we are even wise enough not to say it. We sit silently, he with Kerry's noble old head against his foot, each busy with his own thoughts and reflections, but each conscious of the friendly nearness of the other. You have never had a friend, if you have never known one with whom you might sit a silent, easy hour. To-night he sucked savagely at his old pipe, and his eyes were somber.

"You got the straight tip from Miss Sally Ruth, father," he said, coming out of a brown study. "What do you suppose that piker 's trying to crawl out of his cocoon for? He never wanted to caper around Appleboro women before, did he? No. And here he 's been

muldooning to get some hog-fat off and some wind and waistline back. Now, why? To please himself? *He* don't have to care a hoot what he looks like. To please some girl? That 's more likely. Parson: that girl 's Mary Virginia Eustis." He added, through his teeth: "Hunter knows. Hunter 's steering." And then, with quiet conviction: "They 're both as crooked as hell!" he finished.

"But the thing 's absurd on the face of it! Why, the mere notion is preposterous!" I insisted, angrily.

"I have seen worse things happen," said he, shortly. "But there,—keep your hair on! Things don't happen unless they 're slated to happen, so don't let it bother you too much. You go turn in and forget everything except that you need a night's sleep."

I tried to follow his sound advice, but although I needed a night's sleep and there was no tangible reason why I should n't have gotten it, I did n't. The shadow of Inglesby haunted my pillow.

CHAPTER XIII

"EACH IN HIS OWN COIN"

WITH the New Year had descended upon John Flint an obsessing and tormenting spirit which made him by fits and starts moody, depressed, nervous, restless, or wholly silent and abstracted. I have known him to come in just before dawn, snatch a few hours' sleep, and be off again before day had well set in, though he must already have been far afield, for Kerry heeled him with lagging legs and hanging head. Or he would shut himself up, and refusing himself to all callers, fall into a cold fury of concentrated effort, sitting at his table hour after hour, tireless, absorbed, accomplishing a week's overdue work in a day and a night. Often his light burned all night through. Some of the most notable papers bearing his name, and research work of far-reaching significance, came from that workroom then—as if lumps of ambergris had been tossed out of a whirlpool.

All this time, too, he was working in conjunction with the Washington Bureau, experimenting with remedies for the boll-weevil, and fighting the plague of the cattle-tick. This, and the other outside work in which he was so immensely interested, could not be allowed to hang fire. Like many another, he found himself for his salvation caught in the great human net he himself had

helped to spin. It was not only the country people who held him. Gradually, as he passed to and from on his way among them, and became acquainted with their children, there had sprung up a most curious sort of understanding between the Butterfly Man on the one side, and the half-articulate foreigners in the factory and the sly secretive mill-workers on the other.

People I had never been able to get at humanly, people who resisted even Madame, not only chose to open their doors but their mouths, to Meester Fleent. Uncouth fumbling men, slip-shod women, dirty-faced children, were never dumb and suspicious or wholly untruthful and evasive, where the Butterfly Man was concerned. He was one to whom might be told, without shame, fear, or compunction, the plain, blunt, terrible truth. *He understood.*

"I wish you 'd look up Petronovich's boy, father," he might tell me, or, "Madame, have a woman-talk with Lovena Smith's girl at the mills, will you? Lovena 's a fool, and that girl 's up against things." And we went, and wondered, afterwards, what particularly tender guardian angels kept close company with our Butterfly Man.

Then occurred the great event which put Meester Fleent in a place apart in the estimation of all Appleboro, forever settled his status among the mill-hands and the "hickeys," and incidentally settled a tormenting doubt of himself in his own mind. I mean the settling of the score against Big Jan.

Half-Russian Jan was to the Poles what a padrone too often is to the Italian laborers, a creature who herded them together and mercilessly worked them for the profit

of others, and incidentally his own, an exacting tyrant against whose will it was useless to rebel. He had a little timid wife with red eyes—perhaps because she cried so much over the annual baby which just as annually died. He made a good deal of money, but the dark Slav passion for whisky forced him to spend what he earned, and this increased a naturally sullen temper. He was the thorn in the Parish side; that we could do so little for the Poles was due in a large measure to Jan's stubborn hindering.

His people lived in terror of him. When they displeased him he beat them. It was not a light beating, and once or twice we had in the Guest Rooms nursed its victims back into some semblance of humanity. But what could we do? Jan was so efficient a foreman that Inglesby's power was always behind him. So when Jan chose to get very drunk, and sang long, monotonous songs, particularly when he sang through his teeth, lugubriously:

"Yeszeze Polska nie Zginela
Poki my Zygemy . . ."

men and women trembled. Poland might not be lost, but somebody's skin always paid for that song.

In passing one morning—it was a holiday—through the Poles' quarters, an unpleasant enough stretch which other folks religiously avoided, the Butterfly Man heard shrieks coming from Michael Karski's back yard. It was Michael's wife and children who screamed.

"It is the Boss who beats Michael, Meester Fleent," a man volunteered. "The Boss, he is much drunk. Karski's woman, she did not like the ways of him in her

house, and Michael said, 'I will to send for the police.' So Big Jan beats Michael, and Michael's woman, she hollers like hell."

John Flint knew inoffensive, timid Michael; he knew his broad-bosomed, patient, cowlike wife, and he liked the brood of shockheaded youngsters who plodded along patient in old clothes, bare-footed, and with scanty enough food. He had made a corn-cob doll for the littlest girl and a cigar-box wagon with spool wheels for the littlest boy. Perhaps that is why he turned and went with the rest to Michael's yard where Big Jan was knocking Michael about like a ten-pin, grunting through his teeth: "Now! Sen' for those policemens, you!"

Michael was no pretty thing to look upon, for Jan was in an uglier mood than usual, and Michael had greatly displeased him; therefore it was Michael's turn to pay. Nobody interfered, for every one was horribly afraid Big Jan would turn upon *him*. Besides, was not he the Boss, and could he not say Go, and then must not a man go, short of pay, and with his wife and children crying? Of a verity!

The Butterfly Man slipped off his knapsack and laid his net aside. Then he pushed his way through the scared onlookers.

"Meester Fleent! For God's love, save my man, Meester Flint!" Michael's wife Katya screamed at him.

By way of answer Meester Fleent very deliberately handed her his eye-glasses. Then one saw that his eyes, slitted in his head, were cold and bright as a snake's; his chin thrust forward, and in his red beard his lips made a straight line like a clean knife-cut. Two bright

red spots had jumped into his tanned cheeks. His lean hands balled.

He said no word; but the crumpled thing that was Michael was of a sudden plucked bodily out of Big Jan's hands and thrust into the waiting woman's. The astonished Boss found himself confronting a pale and formidable face with a pair of eyes like glinting sword-blades.

Kerry had followed his master, and was now close to his side. For the moment Flint had forgotten him. But Big Jan's evil eyes caught sight of him. He knew the Butterfly Man's dog very well. He snickered. A huge foot shot out, there was a howl of anguish and astonishment, and Kerry went flying through the air as if shot from a catapult.

"So!" Jan grunted like a satisfied hog, "I feex *you* like that in one meenute, me."

The red jumped from John Flint's cheeks to his eyes, and stayed there. Why, this hulking brute had hurt *Kerry!* His breath exhaled in a whistling sigh. He seemed to coil himself together; with a tiger-leap he launched himself at the great hulk before him. It went down. It had to.

I know every detail of that historic fight. Is it not written large in the Book of the Deeds of Appleboro, and have I not heard it by word of mouth from many a raving eye-witness? Does not Dr. Walter Westmoreland lick his lips over it unto this day?

A long groaning sigh went up from the onlookers. Meester Fleent was a great and a good man; but he was a crippled man. Death was very close to him.

Big Jan was not too drunk to fight savagely, but he was in a most horrible rage, and this weakened him. He

meant to kill this impudent fellow who had taken Michael away from him before he had half-finished with him. But first he would break every bone in the crippled man's body, take him in his hands and break his back over one knee as one does a slat. A man with one leg to balk him, Big Jan? That called for a killing. Jan had no faintest idea he might not be able to make good this pleasant intention.

It was a stupendous fight, a Homeric fight, a fight against odds, which has become a town tradition. If Jan was formidable, a veritable bison, his opponent was no cringing workman scared out of his wits and too timid to defend himself. John Flint knew his own weakness, knew what he could expect at Jan's hands, and it made him cool, collected, wary, and deadly. He was no more the mild-mannered, soft-spoken Butterfly Man, but another and a more primal creature, fighting for his life. Big Jan, indeed, fancied he had nobody but the Butterfly Man to deal with; as a matter of fact he was tackling Slippy McGee.

Skilled, watchful, dangerous, that old training saved him. Every time Jan came to his feet, roaring, thrashing his arms like flails, making head-long, bull-like rushes, the Butterfly Man managed to send him sprawling again. Then he himself caught one well-aimed blow, and went staggering; but before slow-moving and raging Jan could follow up his advantage, with a lightning-like quickness the Butterfly Man made a battering ram of his head, caught Jan in the pit of the stomach, and even as he fell Jan went down, too, and went down underneath. Desperately, fighting like a fiend, John Flint kept him down. And presently using every wrestler's

trick that he knew, and bringing to bear every ounce of his saved and superb strength, in a most orderly, businesslike, cold-blooded manner he proceeded to pound Big Jan into pulp. The devil that had been chained these seven years was a-loose at last, rampant, fully aroused, and not easily satisfied. Besides, had not Jan most brutally and wantonly tried to kill Kerry?

If it was a well deserved it was none the less a most drastic punishment, and when it was over Big Jan lay still. He would lie prone for many a day, and he would carry marks of it to his grave.

When the tousled victor, with a reeling head, an eye fast closing, and a puffed and swollen lip, staggered upright and stood swaying on his feet, he found himself surrounded by a great quiet ring of men and women who regarded him with eyes of wonder and amaze. He was superhuman; he had accomplished the impossible; paid the dreaded Boss in his own coin, yea, given him full measure to the running over thereof! No man of all the men Jan had beaten in his time had received such as Jan himself had gotten at this man's hands today. The reign of the Boss was over: and the conqueror was a crippled man! A great sighing breath of sheer worshipful admiration went up; they were too profoundly moved to cheer him; they could only stand and stare. When they wished, reverently, to help him, he waved them aside.

"Where 's my dog?" he demanded thickly through his swollen lips. "Where 's Kerry? If he 's dead—" he cast upon fallen Jan a menacing glare.

"Your dog 's in bed with the baby, and Ma 's give him milk with brandy in it, and he drank it and growled at

her, and the boys is holding him down now to keep him from coming out to you, and he ain't much hurt nohow," squealed one of Michael's big-eyed children.

John Flint, stretching his arms above his head, drew in a great gulping mouthful of air, exhaled it, and laughed a deepchested, satisfied laugh, for all he was staggering like a drunken man. Here Michael's wife Katya came puffing out of her house like a traction engine—such was the shape in which nature formed her—and falling on her knees, caught his hand to her vast bosom, weeping like the overflowing of a river and blubbering uncouth sounds.

"Get up, you crazy woman!" snarled John Flint, his face going brick-red. "Stop licking my hand, and get up!" Although he did not know it, Katya symbolized the mental attitude of every laborer in Appleboro toward him from that hour.

"Here 's Doctor Westmoreland! And here comes the po-lice!" yelled a boy, joyous with excitement.

Westmoreland cast one by no means sympathetic glance at the wreck on the ground, and his big arms went about John Flint; his fingers flew over him like an apprehensive father's.

"What 's all this? Who 's been fighting here, you people?" demanded the town marshal's brisk voice. "Big Jan? And—good Lord! *Mister Flint!*" His eyes bulged. He looked from Big Jan on the ground to the Butterfly Man under Westmoreland's hands, with an almost ludicrous astonishment.

"I 'm sure sorry, Mr. Flint, if I have to give you a little trouble for awhile, but—"

"But you 'll be considerably sorrier if you do it," said

Dr. Walter Westmoreland savagely. "You take that hulk over there to the jail, until I have time to see him. I can't have him sent home to his wife in that shape. And look here, Marshal: Jan got exactly what he deserved; it 's been coming to him this long time. If Inglesby's bunch tries to take a hand in this, *I 'll* try to make Appleboro too hot to hold somebody. Understand?"

The marshal was a wise enough man, and he understood. Inglesby's pet foreman had been all but killed, and Inglesby would be furiously angry. But—Mr. Flint had done it, and behind Mr. Flint were powers perhaps as potent as Inglesby's. One thing more may have influenced the marshal: The hitherto timid and apathetic people had merged into a compact and ominous ring around the Butterfly Man and the doctor. A shrill murmur arose, like the wind in the trees presaging a storm. There would be riot in staid Appleboro if one were so foolish as to lay a detaining hand upon John Flint this day. More yet, the beloved Westmoreland himself would probably begin it. Never had the marshal seen Westmoreland look so big and so raging.

"All right, Doctor," said he, hastily backing off. "I reckon you 're man enough to handle this."

Some proud worshiper brought Mr. Flint his hat, knapsack, and net, and the mountainous Katya insisted upon tenderly placing his glasses upon his nose—upside down. Westmoreland used to say afterward that for a moment he feared Flint was going to bite her hand! Then man and dog were placed in the doctor's car and hurried home to my mother; who made no comment, but put both in the larger Guest Room, the whimpering dog on a comfort

at the foot of his master's bed. Kerry had a broken rib, but outside of this he was not injured. He would be out and all right again in a week, Westmoreland assured his anxious master.

"Oh, you *man,* you!" crowed Westmoreland. "John, John, if anything were needed to make me love you, this would clinch it! Prying open nature's fist, John, having butterflies bear your name, working hand in glove with your government, boosting boys, writing books, are all of them fine big grand things. But if along with them one 's man enough to stand up, John, with the odds against him, and punish a bully and a scoundrel, the only way a bully and a scoundrel can feel punishment, that 's a heart-stirring thing, John! It gets to the core of my heart. It is n't so much the fight itself, it 's being able to take care of oneself and others when one has to. Yes, yes, yes. A fight like that is worth a million dollars to the man who wins it!"

Westmoreland may be president of the Peace League, and tell us that force is all wrong. Nevertheless, his great-grandmother was born in Tipperary.

We kept the Butterfly Man indoors for a week, while Westmoreland doctored a viciously black eye and sewed up his lip. Morning and afternoon Appleboro called, and left tribute of fruit and flowers.

"Gad, suh, he behaved like one of Stonewall Jackson's men!" said Major Cartwright, pridefully. "No yellow in *him;* he 's one of *us!*"

At nights came the Polish folks, and these people whom he had once despised because they "had n't got sense enough to talk American," he now received with a complete and friendly understanding.

"I just come by and see how you make to feel, Meester."

"Oh, I feel fine, Joe, thank you."

There would be an interval of absolute silence, which did not seem to embarrass either visited or visitor. Then:

"Baby better now?" Meester would ask, interestedly.

"That beeg doctor, he oil heem an' make heem well all right."

After awhile: "I mebbe go now, Meester."

"Good-night," said the host, briefly.

At the door the Pole would turn, and look back, with the wistfully animal look of the Under Dog.

"Those cheeldren, they make to get you the leetle bug. You mebbe like that, Meester, yes? They make to get you plenty much bug, those cheeldren. We *all* make to get you the bug, Meester, thank you."

"That 's mighty nice of you folks." Then one felt the note in the quiet voice which explained his hold upon people.

"Hell, no. We *like* to do that for you, Meester. Thank you." And closing the door gently after him, he would slink off.

"They don't need to be so allfired grateful," said John Flint frankly. "Parson, I 'm the guy to be grateful. I got a whole heap more out of that shindy than a black eye and a pretty mouth. I was bluemolding for a man-tussle, and that scrap set me up again. You see —I was n't sure of myself any more, and it was souring on my stomach. Now I know I have n't lost out, I feel like a white man. Yep, it gives a fellow the holiday-heart to be dead sure he 's plenty able to use his

fists if he 's got to. Westmoreland 's right about that."

I was discreetly silent. God forgive me, in my heart I also was most sinfully glad my Butterfly Man could and would use his fists when he had to. I do not believe in peace at any price. I know very well that wrong must be conquered before right can prevail. But I should n't have been so set up!

"Here," said he one morning. "Ask Madame to give this to Jan's wife. And say, beg her for heaven's sake to buy some salve for her eyelids, will you?" "This" was a small roll of bills. "I owe it to Jan," he explained, with his twistiest smile.

Westmoreland's skill removed all outward marks of the fray, and the Butterfly Man went his usual way; but although he had laid at rest one cruel doubt, he was still in deep waters. Because of his stress his clothes had begun to hang loosely upon him.

Now the naturalist who knows anything at all of those deep mysterious well-springs underlying his great profession, understands that he is a 'prentice hand learning his trade in the workshop of the Almighty; wherein *"the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."* As Paul on a time reminded the Romans.

Wherefore I who had learned somewhat from the Little Peoples now applied what they had taught me, and when I saw my man grow restless, move about aimlessly, withdraw into himself and become as one blind and dumb and unhearing, I understood he was facing a change, making ready to project himself into some larger phase of existence as yet in the womb of the future. So I did not question what wind drove him forth before

it like a lost leaf. The loving silent companionship of red Kerry, the friendly faces of young children to whom he was kind, the eyes of poor men and women looking to him for help, these were better for him now than I.

But my mother was not a naturalist, and she was provoked with John Flint. He ate irregularly, he slept as it pleased God. He was "running wild" again. This displeased her, particularly as Appleboro had at her instigation included Mr. John Flint in its most exclusive list, and there were invitations she was determined he should accept. She had put her hand to the social plow in his behalf, and she had no faintest notion of withdrawing it. Once fairly aroused, Madame had that able-bodied will heaven seems to have lavished so plenteously upon small women: In recompense, I dare say, for lack of size.

Therefore Mr. Flint duteously appeared at intervals among the elect, and appeared even to advantage. And my mother remarked, complacently, that blood will tell: he had the air! He was not expected to dance, but he was a superb cardplayer. He never told jokes, and so avoided deadly repetition. He had in a large measure that virtue the Chinese extol—the virtue of allowing others to save their faces in peace. Was it any wonder Mr. Flint's social position was soon solidly established?

He played the game as my mother forced it upon him, though at times, I think, it bored and chafed him sorely. What chafed him even more sorely was the unprecedented interest many young ladies—and some old enough to know better—suddenly evinced in entomology.

Mr. Flint almost overnight developed a savage cunning in eluding the seekers of entomological lore. One

might suppose a single man would rejoice to see his drab workroom swarm with these brightly-colored fluttering human butterflies; he bore their visits as visitations, displaying the chastened resignation Job probably showed toward the latest ultra-sized carbuncle.

"Cheer up!" urged Laurence, who was watching this turn of affairs with unfeeling mirth. "The worst is yet to come. These are only the chickens: wait until the hens get on your trail!"

"Mr. Flint," said Mary Virginia one afternoon, rubbing salt into his smarting wounds, "Mr. Flint, I am so glad all the girls like you so much. You fascinate them. They say you are such a profoundly clever and interesting man, Mr. Flint! Why, some of those girls are perfectly demented about you!"

"Demented," said he, darkly, "is the right word for them when it comes down to fussing about *me.*" Now Laurence had just caught him in his rooms, and, declaring that he looked overworked and pale, had dragged him forcibly outside on the porch, where we were now sitting. Mary Virginia, in a white skirt, sport coat, and a white felt hat which made her entrancingly pretty, had been visiting my mother and now strolled over to John Flint's, after her old fashion.

"I feel like making the greatest sort of a fuss about you myself," she said honestly. "Anyhow, I 'm mighty glad girls like you. It 's a good sign."

"If they do—though God knows I can't see why—I 'm obliged to them, seeing it pleases *you!*" said Flint, without, however, showing much gratitude in eyes or voice. "To tell you the truth, it looks to me at times as if they were wished on me."

Mary Virginia tried to look horrified, and giggled instead.

"If I could only make any of them understand anything!" said the Butterfly Man desperately, "but I can't. If only they really wanted to know, I 'd be more than glad to teach them. But they don't. I show them and show them and tell them and tell them, over and over and over again, and the same thing five minutes later, and they have n't even listened! They don't care. What do they take up my time and say they like my butterflies for, when they don't like them at all and don't want to know anything about them? That 's what gets me!"

Laurence winked at Mary Virginia, shamelessly.

"Bugs!" said he, inelegantly. "That 's what 's intended to get you, you old duffer!"

"Mr. Flint," said Mary Virginia, with dancing eyes. "I don't blame those girls one single solitary bit for wanting to know all about—butterflies."

"But they don't want to know, I tell you!" Mr. Flint's voice rose querulously.

"My dear creature, I 'd be stuck on you myself if I were a girl," said Laurence sweetly. "Padre, prepare yourself to say, 'Bless you, my children!' I see this innocent's finish." And he began to sing, in a lackadaisical manner, through his nose:

> "Now you 're married you must obey,
> You must be true to all you say,
> Live together all your life—"

No answering smile came to John Flint's lips. He made no reply to the light banter, but stiffened, and

stared ahead of him with a set face and eyes into which crept an expression of anguish. Mary Virginia, with a quick glance, laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't mind Laurence and me, we 're a pair of sillies. You and the Padre are too good to put up with us the way you do," she said, coaxingly. "And—we girls do like you, Mr. Flint, whether we 're wished on you or not."

That seductive "we" in that golden voice routed him, horse and foot. He looked at the small hand on his arm, and his glance went swiftly to the sweet and innocent eyes looking at him with such frank friendliness.

"It 's better than I deserve," he said, gently enough. "And it is n't I 'm not grateful to the rest of them for liking me,—if they do. It 's that I want to box their ears when they pretend to like my insects, and don't."

"Being a gentleman has its drawbacks," said I, tentatively.

"Believe *me!*" he spoke with great feeling. "It 's nothing short of doing a life-stretch!"

The boy and girl laughed gaily. When he spoke thus it added to his unique charm. So profoundly were they impressed with what he had become, that even what he had been, as they remembered it, increased their respect and affection. That past formed for him a somber background, full of half-lights and shadows, against which he stood out with the revealing intensity of a Rembrandt portrait.

"What I came over to tell you, is that Madame says you 're to stay home this evening, Mr. Flint," said Mary Virginia, comfortably. "I 'm spending the night with Madame, you 're to know, and we 're planning a nice

folksy informal sort of a time; and you 're to be home."

"Orders from headquarters," commented Laurence.

"All right," agreed the Butterfly Man, briefly.

Mary Virginia shook out her white skirts, and patted her black hair into even more distractingly pretty disorder.

"I 've got to get back to the office—mean case I 'm working on," complained Laurence. "Mary Virginia, walk a little way with me, won't you? Do, child! It will sweeten all my afternoon and make my work easier."

"You have n't grown up a bit—thank goodness!" said Mary Virginia. But she went with him.

The Butterfly Man looked after them speculatively.

"Mrs. Eustis," he remarked, "is an ambitious sort of a lady, is n't she? Thinks in millions for her daughter, expects her to make a great match and all that. Miss Sally Ruth told me she 'd heard Mrs. Eustis tried once or twice to pull off a match to suit herself, but Miss Mary Virginia would n't stand for it."

"Why, naturally, Mrs. Eustis would like to see the child well settled in life," said I.

"Oh, you don't have to be a Christian *all* the time," said he calmly. "I know Mrs. Eustis, too. She talked to me for an hour and a half without stopping, one night last week. See here, parson: Inglesby 's got a roll that outweighs his record. Suppose he wants to settle down and reform—with a young wife to help him do it —would n't it be a real Christian job to lady 's-aid him?"

I eyed him askance.

"Now there 's Laurence," went on the Butterfly Man, speculatively. "Laurence is making plenty of trouble, but not so much money. No, Mrs. Eustis would n't faint

at the notion of Inglesby, but she 'd keel over like a perfect lady at the bare thought of Laurence."

"I don't see," said I, crossly, "why she should be called upon to faint for either of them. Inglesby 's—Inglesby. That makes him impossible. As for the boy, why, he rocked that child in her cradle."

"That did n't keep either of them from growing up a man and a woman. Looks to me as if they were beginning to find it out, parson."

I considered his idea, and found it so eminently right, proper, and beautiful, that I smiled over it. "It would be ideal," I admitted.

"Her mother would n't agree with you, though her father might," he said dryly. And he asked:

"Ever had a hunch?"

"A presentiment, you mean?"

"No; a hunch. Well, I 've got one. I 've got a hunch there 's trouble ahead for that girl."

This seemed so improbable, in the light of her fortunate days, that I smiled cheerfully.

"Well, if there should be,—here are you and I to stand by."

"Sure," said he, laconically, "that 's all we 're here for—to stand by."

Although it was January, the weather was again springlike. All day the air was like a golden wine, drenched in a golden sun. All day in the cedars' dark and vivid green the little wax-wings flew in and out, and everywhere the blackberry bramble that "would grace the parlors of heaven" was unfolding its crisp red leaves and white buds; and all the roads and woods were gay with the scarlet berries of the casida, which the

robins love. And the nights were clear and still and starry, nights of a beauty so vital one sensed it as something alive.

Because Mary Virginia was to spend that night at the Parish House, Mrs. Eustis having been called away and the house for once free of guests, my mother had seized the occasion to call about her the youth in which her soul delighted. To-night she was as rosy and bright-eyed as any one of her girl-friends. She beamed when she saw the old rooms alive and alight with fresh and laughing faces and blithe figures. There was Laurence, with that note in his voice, that light in his eyes, that glow and glory upon him, which youth alone knows; and Dabney, with his black hair, as usual, on end, and his intelligent eyes twinkling behind his glasses; and Claire Dexter, colored like a pearl set in a cluster of laughing girls; and Mary Virginia, all in white, so beautiful that she brought a mist to the eyes that watched her. All the other gay and charming figures seemed but attendants for this supremer loveliness, snow-white, rose-red, ebony-black, like the queen's child in the fairy-tale.

The Butterfly Man had obediently put in his appearance. With the effect which a really strong character produces, he was like an insistent deep undernote that dominates and gives meaning to a lighter and merrier melody. All this bright life surged, never away from, but always toward and around him. Youth claimed him, shared itself with him, gave him lavishly of its best, because he fascinated and ensnared its fresh imagination. Though he should live to be a thousand it would ever pay homage to some nameless magic quality of spirit which was his.

"Are you writing something new? Have you found another butterfly?" asked the young things, full of interest and respect.

Well, he *had* promised a certain paper by a certain time, though what people could find to like so much in what he had to say about his insects—

"Because," said Dabney, "you create in us a new feeling for them. They 're living things with a right to their lives, and you show us what wonderful little lives most of them are. You bring them close to us in a way that does n't disgust us. I guess, Butterfly Man, the truth is you 've found a new way of preaching the old gospel of One Father and one life; and the common sense of common folks understands what you mean, thanks you for it, likes you for it, and—asks you to tell us some more."

"Whenever a real teacher appears, always the common people hear him gladly," said I, reflectively.

"Only," said Mary Virginia, quickly, "when the teacher himself is just as uncommon as he can be, Padre." She smiled at John Flint with a sincerity that honored him.

He stood abashed and silent before this naïve appreciation. It was at once his greatest happiness and his deepest pain—that open admiration of these clean-souled youngsters.

When he had gone, I too slipped away, for the still white night outside called me. I went around to that favorite retreat of mine, the battered seat shut in among spireas and syringas. I like to say my rosary out of doors. The beads slipping through my fingers soothed me with their monotonous insistent petition. Prayer

brought me closer to the heart of the soft and shining night, and the big still stars.

They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same and thy years shall have no end.

The surety of the beautiful words brought the great overshadowing Presence near me. And I fell into a half-revery, in which the hailmarys wove themselves in and out, like threads in a pattern.

Dreamily enough, I heard the youthful guests depart, in a gale of laughter and flute-like goodnights. And I noted, too, that no light as yet shone in the Butterfly Man's rooms. Well—he would hurl himself into the work to-morrow, probably, and clear it up in an hour or two. He was like that.

My retreat was just off the path, and near the little gate between our grounds and Judge Mayne's. Thus, though I was completely hidden by the screening bushes and the shadow of the holly tree as well, I could plainly see the two who presently came down the bright open path. Of late it had given me a curious sense of comfort to see Laurence with Mary Virginia, and, I reflected, he had been her shadow recently. I liked that. His strength seemed to shield her from Hunter's ambiguous smile, from Inglesby's thoughts, even from her own mother's ambition.

I could see my girl's dear dark head outlined with a circle of moonlight as with a halo, and it barely reached my tall boy's shoulder. Her hand lay lightly on his arm, and he bent toward her, bringing his close-cropped brown head nearer hers. I could n't have risen or

spoken then, without interrupting them. I merely glanced out at them, smilingly, with my rosary in my finger.

I reached the end of a decade: *"As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be—"*

They stopped at the gate, and fell silent for a space, the girl with her darling face uplifted. The fleecy wrap she wore fell about her slim shoulders in long lines, glinting with silver. She did not give the effect of remoteness, but of being near and dear and desirable and beautiful. The boy, looking upon her with his heart in his eyes, drew nearer.

"Mary Virginia," said he, eagerly and huskily and passionately and timidly and hopefully and despairingly, "Mary Virginia, are you going to marry anybody?"

Mary Virginia came back from the stars in the night sky to the stars in the young man's eyes. "Why, yes, I hope I am," said she lightly enough, but one saw she had been startled. "What a funny boy you are, Laurence, to be sure! You don't expect me to remain a spinster, do you?"

"You are going to be married?" This time despair was uppermost.

"I most certainly am!" said Mary Virginia stoutly. "Why, I confided *that* to you years and years and years ago! Don't you remember I always insisted he should have golden hair, and sea-blue eyes, and a classic brow, and a beautiful willingness to go away somewhere and die of a broken heart if I ordered him to?"

"Who is it?"

"Who is who?" she parried provokingly.

"The chap you 're going to marry?"

Mary Virginia appeared to reflect deeply and anxiously. She put out a foot, with the eternal feminine gesture, and dug a neat little hole in the graveled walk with her satin toe.

"Laurence," said she. "I 'm going to tell you the truth. The truth is, Laurence, that I simply hate to have to tell you the truth."

"Mary Virginia!" he stammered wretchedly. "You hate to have to tell *me* the truth? Oh, my dear, why? Why?"

"Because."

"But because why?"

"Because," said the dear hussy, demurely, "I don't know."

Laurence's arms fell to his sides, helplessly; he craned his neck and stared.

"Mary Virginia!" said he, in a breathless whisper.

Mary Virginia nodded. "It 's really none of your business, you know," she explained sweetly; "but as you 've asked me, why, I 'll tell you. That same question plagues and fascinates me, too, Laurence. Why, just consider! Here 's a whole big, big world full of men—tall men, short men, lean men, fat men, silly men, wise men, ugly men, handsome men, sad men, glad men, good men, bad men, rich men, poor men,—oh, all sorts and kinds and conditions and complexions of men: any one of whom I might wake up some day and find myself married to: and I don't know which one! It delights and terrifies and fascinates and amuses and puzzles me when I begin to think about it. Here I 've got to marry Somebody and I don't know any more than Adam's

housecat who and where that Somebody is, and he might pop from around the corner at me, any minute! It makes the thing so much more interesting, so much more like a big risky game of guess, when you don't know, don't you think?"

"No: it makes you miserable," said Laurence, briefly.

"But I 'm not miserable at all!"

"You 're not, because you don't have to be. But I am!"

"You? Why, Laurence! Why should *you* be miserable?" Her voice lost its blithe lightness; it was a little faint. She said hastily, without waiting for his reply: "I guess I 'd better run in. It was silly of me to walk to the gate with you at this hour. I think Madame 's calling me. Goodnight, Laurence."

"No, you don't," said he. "And it was n't silly of you to come, either; it was dear and delightful, and I prayed the Lord to put the notion into your darling head, and He did it. And now you 're here you don't budge from this spot until you 've heard what I 've got to say.

"Mary Virginia, I reckon you 're just about the most beautiful girl in the world. You 've been run after and courted and flattered and followed until it was enough to turn any girl's head, and it would have turned any girl's head but yours. You could say to almost any man alive, Come, and he 'd come—oh, yes, he 'd come quick. You 've got the earth to pick and choose from—but I 'm asking you to pick and choose *me*. I have n't got as much to offer you as I shall have some of these days, but I 've got me myself, body and brain and heart and

soul, sound to the core, and all of me yours, and I think that counts most, if you care as I do. Mary Virginia, will you marry me?"

"Oh, but, Laurence! Why—Laurence—I—indeed, I did n't know—I did n't think—" stammered the girl. "At least, I did n't dream you cared—like that."

"Did n't you? Well, all I can say is, you 've been mighty blind, then. For I do care. I guess I 've always cared like that, only, somehow, it 's taken this one short winter to drive home what I 'd been learning all my life?" said he, soberly. "I reckon I 've been just like other fool-boys, Mary Virginia. That is, I spooned a bit around every good looking girl I ran up against, but I soon found out it was n't the real thing, and I quit. Something in me knew all along I belonged to somebody else. To you. I believe now—Mary Virginia, I believe with all my heart—that I cared for you when you were squalling in your cradle."

"Oh! . . . Did I squall, really?"

"*Squall?* Sometimes it was tummy and sometimes it was temper. Between them you yelled like a Comanche," said this astonishing lover.

Mary Virginia tilted her head back, adorably.

"It was very, very noble of you to mind me—under the circumstances," she conceded, graciously.

"Believe me, it was," agreed Laurence. "I did n't know it, of course, but even at that tender age my fate was upon me, for I *liked* to mind you. Even the bawling did n't daunt me, and I adored you when you resembled a squab. Yes, I was in love with you then. I 'm in love with you now. My girl, my own girl, I 'll go out of this world and into the next one loving you."

"Then why," she asked reproachfully, "have n't you said so?"

"Why have n't I said what?"

"Why, you know. That you—loved me, Laurence." Her rich voice had sunk to a whisper.

"Good Lord, have n't I been saying it?"

"No, you have n't! You 've been merely asking me to marry you. But you have n't said a word about loving me, until this very minute!"

"But you must know perfectly well that I 'm crazy about you, Mary Virginia!" said the boy, and his voice trembled with bewilderment as well as passion. "How in heaven's name could I help being crazy about you? Why, from the beginning of things, there 's never been anybody else, but just you. I never even pretended to care for anybody else. No, there 's nobody but you. Not for me. You 're everything and all, where I 'm concerned. And—please, please look up, beautiful, and tell me the truth: look at me, Mary Virginia!"

The white-clad figure moved a hair's breadth nearer; the uplifted lovely face was very close.

"Do I really mean that to you, Laurence? All that, really and truly?" she asked, wistfully.

"Yes! And more. And more!"

"I 'll be the unhappiest girl in the world: I 'll be the most miserable woman alive—if you ever change your mind, Laurence," said she.

There was a quivering pause. Then:

"You care?" asked the boy, almost breathlessly. "Mary Virginia, you care?" He laid his hands upon her shoulders and bent to search the alluring face.

"Laurence!" said Mary Virginia, with a tremulous,

half-tearful laugh, "Laurence, it 's taken this one short winter to teach me, too. And—you were mistaken, utterly mistaken about those symptoms of mine. It was n't tummy, Laurence. And it was n't temper. I think—I am sure—that what I was trying so hard to squall to you in my cradle was—that I cared, Laurence."

The young man's arms closed about her, and I saw the young mouths meet. I saw more than that: I saw other figures steal out into the moonlight and stand thus entwined, and one was the ghost of what once was I. That other, lost Armand De Rancé, looked at me wistfully with his clear eyes; and I was very, very sorry for him, as one may be poignantly sorry for the innocent, beautiful dead. My hand tightened on my beads, and the feel of my cassock upon me, as a uniform, steadied and sustained me.

Those two had drawn back a little into the shadows as if the night had reached out its arms to them. Such a night belonged to such as these; they invest it, lend it meaning, give it intelligible speech. As for me, I was an old priest in an old cassock, with all his fond and foolish old heart melting in his breast. Youth alone is eternal and immortal. And as for love, it is of God.

"*As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.*" I had finished the decade. And then as one awakes from a trance I rose softly and as softly crept back to the Parish House, happy and at peace, because I had seen that which makes the morning stars rejoice when they sing together.

"Armand," said my mother, sleepily, "is that you, dear? I must have been nodding in my chair. Mary Virginia 's just walked to the gate with Laurence."

"My goodness," said she, half an hour later. "What on earth can that child mean? Had n't you better call her in, Armand?"

"No," said I, decidedly.

Laurence brought her back presently. There must have been something electrical in the atmosphere, for my mother of a sudden sat bolt upright in her chair. Women are like that. That is one of the reasons why men are so afraid of them.

"Padre, and p'tite Madame," began Laurence, "you 've been like a father and mother to me—and—and—"

"And we thought you ought to know," said Mary Virginia.

"My children!" cried my mother, ecstatically, "it is the wish of my heart! Always have I prayed our good God to let this happen—and you see?"

"But it 's a great secret: it 's not to be *breathed*, yet," said Mary Virginia.

"Except, of course, my father—" began Laurence.

"And the Butterfly Man," I added, firmly. Well knowing none of us could keep such news from *him*.

"As for me," said my mother, gloriously reckless, "I shall open one of the two bottles of our great-grandfather's wine!" The last time that wine had been opened was the day I was ordained. "Armand, go and bring John Flint."

When I reached his rooms Kerry was whining over a huddled form on the porch steps. John Flint lay prone, his arms outstretched, horribly suggestive of one crucified. At my step he struggled upright. I had my arms about him in another moment.

"Are you hurt? sick? John, John, my son, what is it? What is it?"

"No, no, I 'm all right. I—was just a little shaky for the minute. There, there, don't you be scared, father." But his voice shook, and the hand I held was icy cold.

"My son, my dear son, what is wrong with you?"

He controlled himself with a great effort. "Oh, I 've been a little off my feed of late, father, that 's all. See, I 'm perfectly all right, now." And he squared his shoulders and tried to speak in his natural voice.

"My mother wanted you to come over for a few minutes, there 's something you 're to know. But if you don't feel well enough—"

He seemed to brace himself. "Maybe I know it already. However, I 'm quite able to walk over and hear —anything I 'm to be told," he said, composedly.

In the lighted parlor his face showed up pale and worn, and his eyes hollow. But his smile was ready, his voice steady, and the hand which received the wine Mary Virginia herself brought him, did not tremble.

"It is to our great, great happiness we wish you to drink, old friend," said Laurence. Intoxicated with his new joy, glowing, shining, the boy was magnificent.

The Butterfly Man turned and looked at him; steadily, deliberately, a long, searching, critical look, as if measuring him by a new standard. Laurence stood the test. Then the man's eyes came back to the girl, rose-colored, radiant, star-eyed, and lingered upon her. He arose, and held up the glass in which our old wine seemed to leap upward in little amber-colored flames.

"You 'll understand," said the Butterfly Man, "that

I have n't the words handy to my tongue to say what 's in my heart. I reckon I 'd have to be God for awhile, to make all I wish for you two come true." There was in look and tone and manner something so sweet and reverent that we were touched and astonished.

When my mother had peremptorily sent Laurence home to the judge, and carried Mary Virginia off to talk the rest of the night through, I went back to his rooms with John Flint, in spite of the lateness of the hour: for I was uneasy about him.

I think my nearness soothed him. For with that boyish diffident gesture of his he reached over presently and held me by the sleeve.

"Parson," he asked, abruptly, "is a man born with a whole soul, or just a sort of shut-up seed of one? Is one given him free, or has he got to earn and pay for one before he gets it, parson? I want to know."

"We all want to know that, John Flint. And the West says Yes, and the East, No."

"I 've been reading a bit," said he, slowly and thoughtfully. "I wanted to hear what both sides had to say. Paul is pretty plain, on his side of the fence. But, parson, some chaps that talk as if they knew quite as much as Paul does, say you don't get anything in this universe for nothing; you have to pay for what you get. As near as I can figure it out, you land here with a chance to earn yourself. You can quit or you can go on—it 's all up to you. If you 're a sport and play the game straight, why, you stand to win yourself a water-tight fire-proof soul. Because, you see, you 've earned and paid for it, parson. That sounded like good sense to me. Looked to me as if I was sort of doing it myself.

But when I began to go deeper into the thing, why, I got stuck. For I can't deny I 'd been doing it more because I had to than because I wanted to. But—whichever way it is, I 'm paying! Oh, yes, I 'm paying!"

"Ah, but so is everybody else, my son," said I, sadly. ". . . each in his own coin. . . . But after all is n't oneself worth while, whatever the cost?"

"I don't know," said he. "That 's where I 'm stuck. Is the whole show a skin game or is it worth while? But, parson, whatever it is, you pay a hell of a price when you buy yourself on the instalment plan, believe me!" his voice broke, as if on a suppressed groan. "If I could get it over and done with, pay for my damned little soul in one big gob, I would n't mind. But to have to buy what I 'm buying, to have to pay what I 'm paying—"

"You are ill," said I, deeply concerned. "I was afraid of this."

He laughed, more like a croak.

"Sure I 'm sick. I 'm sick to the core of me, but you and Westmoreland can't dose me. Nobody can do anything for me, I have to do it myself or go under. That 's part of paying on the instalment plan, too, parson."

"I don't think I exactly understand—"

"No, you would n't. *You* paid in a lump sum, you see. And you got what you got. Whatever it was that got *you,* parson, got the best of the bargain." His voice softened.

"You are talking in parables," said I, severely.

"But I 'm not paying in parables, parson. I 'm paying in *me,*" said he, grimly. And he laughed again, a

laugh of sheer stark misery that raised a chill echo in my heart. His hand crept back to my sleeve.

"I—can't always can the squeal," he whispered.

"If only I could help you!" I grieved.

"You do," said he, quickly. "You do, by being you. I hang on to you, parson. And say, look here! Don't you think I 'm such a hog I can't find time to be glad other folks are happy even if I 'm not. If there 's one thing that could make me feel any sort of way good, it 's to know those two who were made for each other have found it out. It sort of makes it look as if some things do come right, even if others are rotten wrong. I 'm glad till it hurts me. I 'd like you to believe that."

"I do believe it. And, my son! if you can find time to be glad of others' happiness, without envy, why, you 're bound to come right, because you 're sound at the core."

"You reckon I 'm worth my price, then, parson?"

"I reckon you 're worth your price, whatever it is. I don't worry about you, John Flint."

And somehow, I did not. I left him with Kerry's head on his knee. His hand was humanly warm again, and the voice in which he told me goodnight was bravely steady. He sat erect in his doorway, fronting the night like a soldier on guard. If he were buying his soul on the instalment plan I was sure he would be able to meet the payments, whatever they were, as they fell due.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WISHING CURL

WITH February the cold that the Butterfly Man had wished for came with a vengeance. The sky lost its bright blue friendliness and changed into a menacing gray, the gray of stormy water. Overnight the flowers vanished, leaving our gardens stripped and bare, and our birds that had been so gay were now but sorry shivering balls of ruffled feathers, with no song left in them. When rain came the water froze in the wagon-ruts, and ice-covered puddles made street-corners dangerous.

This intense cold, damp, heavy, penetrating, coming upon the heels of the unseasonably warm weather, seemed to bring to a head all the latent sickness smoldering in the mill-parish, for it suddenly burst forth like a conflagration. If the Civic League had not already done so much to better conditions in the poorer district, we must have had a very serious epidemic, as Dr. Westmoreland bluntly told the Town Council.

As it was, things were pretty bad for awhile, and the inevitable white hearse moved up and down, stopping now at this door, now at that. In one narrow street, I remember, it moved in the exact shape of a figure eight within the week. I do not like to recall those days. I buried the children with the seal of Holy Mother Church upon their innocence; I repeated over them "The Lord

hath given, the Lord hath taken away''—and knew in my heart that it was man-made want, the greed of money-madness, that had taken them untimely out of their mothers' laps. And the earth was like iron; it opened unwillingly to receive the babes of the poor.

In and out of stricken mill-houses and shabby shacks, as regularly as Westmoreland and I, whose business and duty lay there, came John Flint. He made no effort to comfort parents, although these seemed to derive a curious consolation from his presence. He did not even come because he wanted to; he came because the children begged to see the Butterfly Man and one may not refuse a sick child. He had made friends with them, made toys for them; and now he saw dull eyes brighten at his approach and pale faces try to smile; languid and fever-hot hands were held out to him. All the force of the affection of young children, their dazzling faith, the almost unthinkable power upon their plastic minds of those whom they trust, came home to him. He could not, in such an hour, accept lightly, with a careless smile, the fact that children loved him. And once or twice a small hand that clung to him grew cold in his clasp, and under his eyes a child's closed to this world.

Now, something that saw straight, thought like a naked sword-blade, ate like a testing acid into shams and hated evasions and half-truths and subterfuges, had of late been showing more and more behind John Flint's reserve; and I think it might have hardened into a mentality cold and bright and barren, hard and cutting as a diamond, had it not been for the children whom he had to see suffer and die.

There was one child of whom he was particularly fond

—a child with the fairest of fair hair, deep and sweet blue eyes, and the quickest, shyest, most fleeting of smiles to lighten flashingly her small pale serious face. She had been one of the first of the mill folks' children to make friends with the Butterfly Man. She used to watch for him, and then, holding on to one of his fingers, she liked to trot sedately down the street beside him.

This child's going was sudden and rather painful. Westmoreland did what he could, but there was no stamina in that frail body, so her's had been one of the small hands to fall limp and still out of John Flint's. The doll he had made for her lay in the crook of her arm; it had on a red calico dress, very garish in the gray room, and against the child's whiteness.

Westmoreland stood, big and compassionate, at the foot of the bed. His ruddy face showed wan and behind his glasses his gray tired eyes winked and blinked.

"There must be," said the Doctor, as if to himself, "some eternal vast reservoir somewhere, that stores up all this terrible total of unnecessary suffering—the cruel and needless suffering inflicted upon children and animals, in particular. Perhaps it 's a spiritual serum used for the saving of the race. Perhaps races higher up than we use it—as *we* use rabbits and guinea-pigs. No, no, nothing 's wasted; there 's a forward end to pain, somewhere." He looked down at the child and shook his head doubtfully:

"But when all is said and done," he muttered, "what do such as these get out of it? Nothing—so far as we can see. They 're victims, they and the innocent beasts, thrust into a world which tortures and devours them. Why? Why? Why?"

"There is nothing to do but leave that everlasting Why to God," said I, painfully.

The Butterfly Man looked up and one saw that cold sword-straight, diamond-hard something in his eyes:

"Parson," said he, grimly, "you 're a million miles off the right track—and you know it. Leaving things to God—things like poor kids dying because they 're gouged out of their right to live—is just about as rotten stupid and wrong as it can well be. God 's all right; he does his part of the job. You do yours, and what happens? Why, my butterflies answer that! I 'm punk on your catechism, and if *this* is all it can teach I hope I die punk on it; but as near as I can make out, original sin is leaving things like this"—and he looked at his small friend with her doll on her arm—"to God, instead of tackling the job yourself and straightening it out."

The child's mother, a gaunt creature without a trace of youth left in her, although she could not have been much more than thirty, shambled over to a chair on the other side of the bed. She wore a faded red calico wrapper—a scrap of it had made the doll's frock—and a blue-checked apron with holes in it. Her hair was drawn painfully back from her forehead, and there was a wispy fringe of it on the back of her scraggy neck. In her dull eyes glimmered nothing but the innate uneasiness of those who are always in need, and her mouth had drawn itself into the shape of a horseshoe. There is no luck in a horseshoe hung thus on a woman's face. One might fancy she felt no emotion, her whole demeanor was so apathetic; but of a sudden she leaned over and took up one of the thick shining curls; half smiling, she began to wrap it about her finger.

"I useter be right smart proud o' Louisa's hair," she remarked in a drawling, listless voice. "She come by it from them uppidy folks o' her pa's. I 've saw her when she was n't much more 'n hair an' eyes, times her pa was laid up with the misery in his chest, an' me with nothin' but piecework weeks on end.

". . . She was a cu'rus kind o' child, Louisa was. She sort o' 'spicioned things was n't right, but you think that child ever let a squeal out o' her? Not her! Lemme tell you-all somethin', jest to show what kind o' a heart that child had, suhs."

With a loving and mothering motion she moved the bright curl about and about her hard finger. She spoke half intimately, half garrulously; and from the curl she would lift her faded eyes to the Butterfly Man's.

" 'T was a Sarrerday night, an' I was a-walkin' up an' down, account o' me bein' awful low in the mind.

" 'Ma,' says Louisa, 'I 'm reel hungry to-night. You reckon I could have a piece o' bread with butter on it? I wisht I could taste some bread with butter on it,' says she.

" 'Darlin',' says I, turrible sad, 'Po' ma c'n give yo' the naked bread an' thanks to God I got even that to give,' I says. 'But they ain't a scrap o' butter in this house, an' no knowin' how to git any. Oh, darlin', ma 's so sorry!'

"She looks up with that quick smile o' her'n. Yes, suh, Mr. Flint, she ups and smiles. 'You don't belong to be sorry any, ma,' says she, comfortin'. 'Don't you mind none at all. Why, ma, darlin', *I just love naked bread without no butter on it!*' says she. My God, Mr. Flint, I bust out a-cryin' in her face. Seemed like I

natchelly could n't stand no mo'!'' And smiling vaguely with her poor old down-curved mouth, she went on fingering the curl.

''Will you-all look a' that!'' she murmured, with pride. ''Even her hair 's lovin', an' sort o' holds on like it wants you should touch it. My Lord o' glory, I 'm glad her pa ain't livin' to see this day! He had his share o' misery, po' man, him dyin' o' lung-fever an' all. . . .

''Six head o' young ones we 'd had, me an' him. An' they 'd all dropped off. Come spring, an' one 'd be gone. I kep' a-comfortin' that man best I could they was better off, angels not bein' pindlin' an' hungry an' barefoot, an' thanks be, they ain't no mills in heaven. But their pa he could n't see it thataway nohow. He was turrible sot on them children, like us pore folks gen'rally is. They was reel fine-lookin' at first.

''When all the rest of 'em had went, her pa he sort o' sot his heart on Louisa here. 'For we ain't got nothin' else, ma,' says he. 'An' please the good Lord, we 're a-goin' to give this one book-learnin' an' sich, an' so be she 'll miss them mills,' he says. 'Ma, less us aim to make a lady o' our Louisa. Not that the Lord ain't done it a'ready,' says her pa, 'but we got to he'p Him keep on an' finish the job thorough.' An' here 's him an' her both gone, an' me without a God's soul belongin' to me this day! My God, Mr. Flint, ain't it something turrible the things happens to us pore folks?''

The Butterfly Man looked from her to Westmoreland and me: doctor of bodies, doctor of souls, naturalist, what had we to say to this woman stripped of all? But she, with the greater wisdom of the poor, spoke for herself

and for us. A sort of veiled light crept into her sodden face.

"It ain't I ain't grateful to you-all," said she. "God knows I be. You was good to Louisa. Doctor, you remember that day you give her a ride in your ottermobile an' forgot to bring her home for more 'n a hour? My, but that child was happy!"

" 'Ma,' says she when I come home that night, 'you know what heaven is?'

" 'Child,' says I, 'folks like me mostly knows what it ain't.'

" 'I beat you, ma!' says she, clappin' her hands. 'Heaven ain't nothin' much but country an' roads an' trees an' butterflies, an' things like that,' says she. 'An' God 's got ottermobiles, plenty an' plenty ottermobiles, an' you ride free in 'em long 's you feel like it, 'cause that 's what they 's *for*. An', ma,' says she, 'God's, showfers is all of 'em Dr. Westmorelands and Mr. Flints.' Yes, suh, you-all been mighty kind to Louisa. But I reckon," she drawled, "it was Mr. Flint Louisa loved best, him bein' a childern's kind o' man, an' on account o' Loujaney." She laid a hand upon the rag doll lying on the little girl's arm.

"From the first day you give her that doll, Mr. Flint —which she named Loujaney, for her an' me both— that child ain't been parted from it." She smiled down at the two. I could almost have prayed she would weep instead. It would have been easier to bear.

"The King's Daughters, they give her a mighty nice doll off their Christmas tree last year, but Louisa, she did n't take to it like she done to Loujaney.

" '*That* doll 's jest a visitin' lady,' says she, 'but

Loujaney, she 's *my child.* Mr. Flint made her a-purpose for me, same 's God made me for you, ma, an' she 's mine by bornation. I can live with Loujaney. I ain't a mite ashamed afore her when we ain't got nothin', but I turn 't other's face to the wall so she won't know. Loujaney 's pore folks same 's you an' me, an' she knows prezac'ly how 't is. That 's why I love her so much.

"An' day an' night," resumed the drawling voice, "them two 's been together. She jest lived an' et an' slept with that doll. If ever a doll gits to grow feelin's, Loujaney 's got 'em. I s'pose I 'd best give that visitin' doll to some child that wants it bad, but I ain't got the heart to take Loujaney away from her ma. I 'm a-goin' to let them two go right on sleepin' together.

"Mr. Flint, suh, seein' Louisa liked you so much, an' it 's you she 'd want to have it—" she leaned over, pushed the thick fair hair aside, and laid her finger upon a very whimsy of a curl, shorter, paler, fairer than the others, just above the little right ear.

"Her pa useter call that the wishin' curl," said she, half apologetically. "You see, suh, he was a comical sort of man, an' a great hand for pertendin' things. I never could pertend. Things is what they is an' pertendin' don't change 'em none. But him an' her was different. That 's how come him to pertend the Lord 'd put the rainbow's pot o' gold in Louisa's hair with a wish in it, an' that ridic'lous curl one side her head, like a mark, was the wishin' curl. He 'd pertend he could pull it twict an' say whisperin', *'Bickery-ickery-ee—my wish is comin' to me,'* an' he 'd git it. An' she liked to pertend 't was so an' she could wish things on it for me an' git 'em. . . . Clo'es an' shoes an' fire an' cake an' beef-

steak an' butter an' stayin' home. . . . Just pertendin', you see.

"Mr. Flint, suh, *I* ain't got a God's thing any more to wish for, but you bein' the sort o' man you are, I 'd rather 't was you had Louisa's wishin' curl, to remember her by." Snip! went the scissors; and there it lay, pale as the new gold of spring sunlight, curling as young grape-tendrils, in the Butterfly Man's open palm.

"*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee,*" said the great Apostle to the lame man who lay beside the gate of the temple that is called, Beautiful.

"I ain't got nothin' else," said the common mill-woman; and laid in John Flint's hand Louisa's wishing-curl.

He stared at it, and turned as pale as the child on her pillow. The human pity of the thing, its sheer stark piercing simplicity, squeezed his heart as with a great hand.

"My God!" he choked. "My—God!" and a rending sob tore loose from his throat. For the first time in his life he had to weep; uncontrolled, unashamed, childlike, fatherly, brotherly. For he had experienced, unselfishly, on account of one of the humblest of God's creatures, one of the great divine emotions. And when that happens to a man it is as if his soul were winnowed by the wind of an archangel's wings.

Westmoreland and I slipped out and left him with the woman. She would know what further thing to say to him.

Outside in the bleak bitter street, the Doctor laid his hand on my shoulder. He winked his eyes rapidly.

"Father," said he, earnestly, "when I witness such a thing as we 've seen this morning, I do not lose faith. I gain it." And he gripped me heartily with his big gloved hand. "Tell John Flint," he added, "that sometimes a rag doll is a mighty big thing for a man to have to his credit." Then he was gone, with a tear freezing on his cheek.

"Angels," John Flint had said more than once, "are not middle-aged doctors with shoulders on them like a barn-door, and ribs like a dray; angels don't have bald heads and wear a red tie and tan shoes. But I 'd pass them all up, from Gabriel down, wings and tail-feathers, for one Walter Westmoreland."

I would, too. And I walked along, thinking of what I had just witnessed; sensing its true value. To those slight and fragile things which had, for John Flint, outweighed the scales of evil—a gray moth, a butterfly's wing, a bird's nest—I added a child's fair hair, and a rag doll that was going to sleep with its ma.

There were but few people on the freezing streets, for folks preferred to stay indoors and hug the fire. Fronting the wind, I walked with a lowered head, and thus collided with a lady who turned a corner at the same time I did.

"Don't apologize, Padre," said Mary Virginia, for it was she. "It was my fault—I was n't looking where I was going."

"Are you by any chance bound for the Parish House? Because my mother will be on her way to a poor thing that 's just lost her only child. Where have you been these past weeks? I have n't seen you for ages."

"Oh, I 've been rather busy, too, Padre. And I

have n't been quite well—" she hesitated. I thought I understood. For, possibly from some servant who had overheard Mrs. Eustis expostulating with her daughter, the news of Mary Virginia's unannounced engagement had sifted pretty thoroughly throughout the length and breadth of Appleboro; a town where an unfledged and callow rumor will start out of a morning and come home to roost at night with talons and tailfeathers.

That Mary Virginia had all James Eustis's own quiet will-power, everybody knew. She would not, perhaps, marry Laurence in the face of her mother's open opposition. Neither would she marry anybody else to please her mother in defiance of her own heart. There was a pretty struggle ahead, and Appleboro took sides for and against, and settled itself with eager expectancy to watch the outcome.

So I concluded that Mary Virginia had not been having a pleasant time. Indeed, it struck me that she was really unwell. One might even suspect she had known sleepless nights, from the shadowed eyes and the languor of her manner.

Just then, swinging down the street head erect, shoulders square, the freezing weather only intensifying his glowing fairness, came Howard Hunter. The man was clear red and white. His gold hair and beard glittered, his bright blue eyes snapped and sparkled. He seemed to rejoice in the cold, as if some Viking strain in him delighted in its native air.

As he paused to greet us a coldness not of the weather crept into Mary Virginia's eyes. She did not speak, but bowed formally. Mr. Hunter, holding her gaze for a moment, lifted his brows whimsically and smiled; then,

bowing, he passed on. She stood looking after him, her lips closed firmly upon each other.

Tucking her hand in my arm, she walked with me to the Parish House gate. No, she said, she could n't come in. But I was to give her regards to the Butterfly Man, and her love to Madame.

"Parson," the Butterfly Man asked me that night, "have you seen Mary Virginia recently?"

"I saw her to-day."

"I saw her to-day, too. She looked worried. She has n't been here lately, has she?"

"No. She has n't been feeling well. I hear Mrs. Eustis has been very outspoken about the engagement, and I suppose that 's what worries Mary Virginia."

"I don't think so. She knew she had to go up against that, from the first. She 's more than a match for her mother. There 's something else. Did n't I tell you I had a hunch there was going to be trouble? Well, I 've got a hunch it 's here."

"Nonsense!" said I, shortly.

"I know," said he, stubbornly. And he added, irrelevantly: "It 's generally known, parson, that Eustis will be nominated. Inglesby 's managed to gain considerable ground, thanks to Hunter, and folks say if it was n't for Eustis he 'd win. As it is, he 'll be swamped. I hear he was thunderstruck when he got wind of what Mayne was going to play against him—for he knows Laurence brought Eustis out. Inglesby 's mighty sore. He 's the sort that hates to have to admit he can't get what he wants."

"Then he 'd better save himself the trouble of having to put it to the test," said I.

"I 'm wondering," said John Flint. "I wish I had n't got that hunch!"

I did not see Mary Virginia again for some time. Just then I moved breathlessly in a horrid round of sickbeds, for the wave had reached its height; already it had swept seventeen of my flock out of time into eternity.

I came home on one of the last of those heavy evenings, to find Laurence waiting for me in my study. He was standing in the middle of the room, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Padre," said he by way of greeting, "have you seen Mary Virginia lately? Has Madame?"

"No, except for a chance meeting one morning on the street. But she has been sending me help right along, bless her."

"Has Madame heard anything from her, Padre?"

"No, I don't think so. But we 've been frightfully busy of late, you understand."

"No, neither of you know," said Laurence, in a low voice. "You would n't know. Padre, I—don't look at me like that, please; I 'm not ill. But, without reason—I swear to you before God, without any reason whatever, that I can conjure up—she has thrown me over, jilted me—Mary Virginia, Padre! And I 'm to forget her. *I 'm to forget her, you understand?* Because she can't marry me." He spoke in a level, quiet, matter of fact voice. Then laughter shook him like a nausea.

I laid my hand upon him. "Now tell me," said I, "what you have to tell me."

"I 've really told you all I know," said Laurence. "Day before yesterday she sent for me. You can't think how happy it made me to have her send for me, how

happy I 've been since I knew she cared! I felt as if there was n't anything I could n't do. There was nothing too great to be accomplished—

"Well, I went. She was standing in the middle of the long drawing-room. There was a fire behind her. She was so like ice I wonder now she did n't thaw. All in white, and cold, and frozen. And she said she could n't marry me. That 's why she had sent for me—to tell me that she meant to break our engagement: *Mary Virginia!*

"I wanted to know why. I was within my rights in asking that, was I not? And she would n't let me get close to her, Padre. She waved me away. I got out of her that there were reasons: no, she would n't say what those reasons were; but there were reasons. Her reasons, of course. When I began to talk, to plead with her, she begged me not to make things harder for her, but to be generous and go away. She just could n't marry me, did n't I understand? So I must release her."

He hung his head. The youth of him had been dimmed and darkened.

"And you said—?"

"I said," said Laurence simply, "that she was mine as much as I was hers, and that I 'd go just then because she asked me to, but I was coming back. I tried to see her again yesterday. She would n't see me. She sent down word she was n't at home. But I knew all along she was. Mary Virginia, Padre!

"I tried again. I have n't got any pride where she 's concerned. Why should I? She 's—she 's my soul, I think. I can't put it into words, because you can't put feelings into words, but she 's the pith of life. Then I wrote her. Half a dozen times I wrote her. I got

down to the level of bribing the colored maid to take the notes to her, one every hour, like a medicine, and slip them under her door. I know she received them. I repeated it again to-day. It 's Mary Virginia at stake, and I can't take chances, can I? And this afternoon she sent this.

"Oh, Laurence, be generous and spare me the torment of questions. So far you have not reproached me; spare me that, too! Don't you understand? I cannot marry you. Accept the inevitable as I do. Forgive me and forget me. M. V. E."

The writing showed extreme nervousness, haste, agitation.

"Well?" said Laurence. But I stood staring at the crumpled bit of paper. I knew what I knew. I knew what my mother had thought fit to reveal to me of the girl's feelings: Mary Virginia had been very sure. I remembered what my eyes had seen, my ears heard. I was sure she was faithful, for I knew my girl. And yet—

There came back to me a morning in spring and I riding gaily off in the glad sunshine, full of faith and of hope. To find what I had found. I handed the note back, in silence.

"Oh, why, why, why?" burst out the boy, in a gust of acute torment. "For God's sake, why? Think of her eyes and her mouth, Padre—and her forehead like a saint's— No, she 's not false. God never made such eyes as hers untruthful. I believe in her. I 've got to believe in her. I tell you, I belong to her, body and soul." He began to walk up and down the room, and his shoulders twitched, as if a lash were laid over them.

"I could forgive her for not loving me, if she does n't love me and found it out, and said so. Women change,

do they not? But—to take a man that loves her—and tear his living soul to shreds and tatters—

"If *she 's* a liar and a jilt, who and what am I to believe? Why should she do it, Padre—to me that love her? Oh, my God, think of it: to be betrayed by the best beloved! No, I can't think it. This is n't just any light girl: this is Mary Virginia!"

I put my hand on his shoulder. He is a head over me, and once again as broad, perhaps. We two fell into step. I did not attempt to counsel or console.

"Here I come like a whining kid, Padre," said he, remorsefully, "piling my troubles upon your shoulders that carry such burdens already. Forgive me!"

"I should n't be able to forgive you if you did n't come," said I. Up and down the little room, up and down, the two of us.

Came a light tap at the door. The Butterfly Man's head followed it.

"Did n't I hear Laurence talking?" asked he, smiling. The smile froze at sight of the boy's face. He closed the door, and leaned against it.

"What 's wrong with her?" he asked, quickly. It did not occur to us to question his right to ask, or to wonder how he knew.

In a dull voice Laurence told him. He held out his hand for the note, read it in silence, and handed it back.

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

"Trouble," said he, curtly; and he asked, reproachfully, "Don't you know her, both of you, by this time?"

"I know," said Laurence, "that she has sent me away from her."

"Because she wants to, or because she thinks she has to?" asked John Flint.

"Why should she do so unless it pleased her?" I asked sorrowfully.

His eyes flashed. "Why, she 's *herself!* A girl like her could n't play anybody false because there 's no falseness in her to do it with. What are you going to do about it?"

"There is nothing to do," said Laurence, "but to release her; a gentleman can do no less."

John Flint's lips curled. "Release her? I 'd hang on till hell froze over and caught me in the ice! I 'd wait. I 'd write and tell her she did n't need to make herself unhappy about me, I was unhappy enough about her for the two of us, because she did n't trust me enough to tell me what her trouble was, so I could help her. That first and always I was her friend, right here, whenever she needed me and whatever she needed me for. And I 'd stand by. What else is a man good for?"

"I believe," said I, "that John Flint has given you the right word, Laurence. Just hold fast and be faithful."

Laurence lifted his haggard face. "There is n't any question of my being faithful to her, Padre. And I could n't make myself believe that she 's less so than I. What Flint says tallies with my own intuition. I 'll write her to-night." He laid his hand on John Flint's arm. "You 're all right, Bughunter," said he, earnestly. " 'Night, Padre." Then he was gone.

"Do you think," said John Flint, when he had rejected every conjecture his mind presented as the possible cause of Mary Virginia's action, "that Inglesby could be at the bottom of this?"

"I think," said I, "that you have an obsession where that man is concerned. He is a disease with you. Good heaven, what could Inglesby possibly have to do with Mary Virginia's affairs?"

"That 's what I 'm wondering. Well, then, who is it?"

"Perhaps," said I, unwillingly, "it is Mary Virginia herself."

"Forget it! She 's not that sort."

"She is a woman."

"Ain't it the truth, though?" he jeered. "What a peach of a reason for not acting like herself, looking like herself, being like herself! She 's a woman! So are all the rest of the folks that were n't born men, if you 'll notice. They 're women; we 're men: and both of us are people. Get it?"

"I get it," said I, annoyed. "Your attitude, John Flint, is a vulgar platitude. And permit me to—"

"I 'll permit you to do anything except get cross," said he, quickly. The ghost of a smile touched his face. "Being bad-tempered, parson, suits you just about as well as plaid pants and a Hello Bill button."

"I am a human being," I began, frigidly.

"And I 'm another. And so is Mary Virginia. And there we are, parson. I 'm troubled. I don't like the looks of things. It 's no use telling myself this is none of my business; it is very much my business. You remember . . . when I came here . . ." he hesitated, for this is a subject we do not like to discuss, "what you were up against . . . parson, I 've thought you must have been caught and crucified yourself, and learned things on the cross, and that 's why you held on to me.

But with the kids, it was different—particularly the little girl. The first thing I ever got from her was a lovely look, the first time ever I set eyes on her she came with an underwing moth. I 'd be a poor sort that would n't be willing to be spilt like water and scattered like dust, if she needed me now, would n't I?"

"But," said I, perplexed, "what can you do? A young lady has seen fit to break her engagement; young ladies often see fit to do that, my dear fellow. This is n't an uncommon case. Also, one does n't interfere in a lady's private affairs, not even when one is an old priest who has loved her since her childhood, nor yet a Butterfly Man who is her devoted friend. Don't you see?"

"I see there 's something wrong," said he, doggedly.

"Perhaps. But that does n't give one the right to pry into something she evidently does n't wish to reveal," I told him.

"I suppose," said he, heavily, "you are right. But if you hear anything, let me know, won't you?"

I promised; but I found out nothing, save that it had not been Mrs. Eustis who influenced her daughter's action. This came out in a call Mrs. Eustis made at the Parish House.

"My dear," she told my mother, "when she told me she had broken that engagement, I was astounded! But I can't say I was n't pleased. Laurence is a dear boy; and his family 's as good as ours—no one can take that away from the Maynes. But Mary Virginia should have done better.

"I quarreled with her, argued with her, pleaded with her. I cried and cried. But she 's James Eustis to the

life—you might as well try to move the Rock of Gibraltar. Then one morning she came to my room and told me she found she could n't marry Laurence! And she had already told him so, and broken her engagement, and I was n't to ask her any questions. I did n't. I was too glad."

"And—Laurence—?" asked my mother, ironically.

"Laurence? Laurence is a *man*. Men get over that sort of thing. I 've known a man to be perfectly mad over his wife—and marry, six months after her death. They 're like that. They always get over it. It 's their nature."

"Let us hope, then, for Laurence's peace of mind," said my mother, "that he 'll get over it—like all the rest of his sex. Though I should n't call Laurence fickle, or faithless, if you ask me."

"He is a very fine boy. I always liked him myself and James adores him. If I had two or three daughters, I 'd be willing to let one of them marry Laurence—after awhile. But having only one I must say I want her to do better."

"I see," said my mother. To me she said later:

"And yet, Armand, although I condemn it, I can quite appreciate Mrs. Eustis's point of view. I was somewhat like that myself, once upon a time."

"You? Never!"

My mother smiled tolerantly.

"Ah, but you never offered me a daughter-in-law I did not relish. It was much easier for me to bear the Church!"

That night I went over to John Flint's, for I thought

that the fact of Mary Virginia's deliberately choosing to act as she had done would in a measure settle the matter and relieve his anxiety.

There was a cedar wood fire before which Kerry lay stretched; little white Pitache, grown a bit stiff of late, occupied a chair he had taken over for his own use and from which he refused to be dislodged. Major Cartwright had just left, and the room still smelt of his cigar, mingling pleasantly with the clean smell of the burning cedar.

On the table, within reach of his hand, was ranged the Butterfly Man's entire secular library: Andrew Lang's translation of Homer; Omar; Richard Burton's Kasidah; Saadi's Gulistan, over which he chuckled; Robert Burns; Don Quixote; Joan of Arc, and Huckleberry Finn; Treasure Island; the Bible Miss Sally Ruth had given him—I never could induce him to change it for my own Douai version—; one or two volumes of Shakespeare; the black Obituary Book, grown loathsomely fat; and the "Purely Original Verse of James Gordon Coogler," which a light-minded professor of mathematics at the University of South Carolina had given him, and in which he evilly delighted. Other books came and went, but these remained. To-night it was the Bible which lay open, at the Book of Psalms.

"Look at this." He laid his finger on a verse of the nineteenth: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

"The times I 've turned that over in my mind, out in the woods by night and the fields by day!" said the Butterfly Man, musingly. "The simple is *me,* parson, and the testimony is green things growing, and butter-

flies and moths, and Kerry, and people, and trouble, and Louisa's hair, and—well, about everything, I reckon.

"Yes, everything 's testimony, and it can make wise the simple—if he 's not too simple. I reckon, parson, the simple is lumped in three lots—the fool for a little while, the fool for half the day, and the life-everlasting twenty-four-hours-a-day, dyed-in-the-wool damn-fool.

"Some of us are the life-everlasting kind, the kind that used to make old man Solomon wall his eyes and throw fits and then get busy and hatch out proverbs with stings in their tails. A lot of us are half-the-day fools; and all the rest are fools for a little while. There 's nobody born that has n't got his times and seasons for being a fool for a while. But that 's the sort of simple the testimony slams some sense into. Like *me,*" he added earnestly, and closed the great Book.

I told him presently what I had heard; that, as he surmised, Mrs. Eustis was not responsible for Mary Virginia's change of mind—or perhaps of heart. He nodded. But he offered no comment. Now, since I had come in, he had been from time to time casting at me rather speculative and doubtful glances. He drummed on the table, smiled sheepishly, and presently reached for a package, unwrapped it, and laid before me a book.

" 'The Relation of Insect Life to Human Society,' " I read, "By John Flint and Rev. Armand Jean De Rancé. With notes and drawings by Father De Rancé." It bore the imprint of a great publishing house.

"You suggested it more than once," said John Flint. "Off and on, these two years, I 've been working on it. All the notes I particularly asked you for were for this. Mighty fine and acute notes they are, too—you 'd never

have been willing to do it if you 'd known they were for publication—I know you. And I saved the drawings. I 'm vain of those illustrations. Abbot's were n't in it, next to yours."

As a matter of fact I have a pretty talent for copying plant and insect. I have but little originality, but this very limitation made the drawings more valuable. They were almost painfully exact, the measurements and coloration being as approximately perfect as I could get them.

Now that the book has been included in all standard lists I need n't speak of it at length—the reviewers have given it what measure of bricks and bouquets it deserved. But it is a clever, able, comprehensive book, and that is why it has made its wide appeal.

Every least credit that could possibly be given to me, he had scrupulously rendered. He had made full use of note and drawing. He made light enough of his own great labor of compilation, but his preface was quick to state his "great indebtedness to his patient and wise teacher."

One sees that the situation was not without irony. But I could not cloud his pleasure in my co-authorship nor dim his happiness by disclaiming one jot or tittle of what he had chosen to accredit me with. It is more blessed to give than to receive, but much more difficult to receive than to give.

"Do you like it?" he asked, hopefully.

"I am most horribly proud of it," said I, honestly.

"Sure, parson? Hand on your heart?"

"Sure. Hand on my heart."

"All right, then," said he, sighing with relief.

"Here 's your share of the loot," and he pushed a check across the table.

"But—" I hesitated, blinking, for it was a check of sorts.

"But nothing. Blow it in. Say, I 'm curious. What are you going to do with yours?"

"What are you going to do with yours?" I asked in return.

He reddened, hesitated; then his head went up.

"I figure it, parson, that by way of that rag-doll I 'm kin to Louisa's ma. As near as I can get to it, Louisa's ma 's my widow. It 's a devil of a responsibility for a live man to have a widow. It worries him. Just to get her off my mind I 'm going to invest my share of this book for her. She 'll at least be sure of a roof and fire and shoes and clothes and bread with butter on it and staying home sometimes. She 'll have to work, of course; anyway you looked at it, it would n't be right to take work away from her. She 'll work, then; but she won't be worked. Louisa 's managed to pull something out of her wishin' curl for her ma, after all. I 'm sure I hope they 'll let the child know."

I could not speak for a moment; but as I looked at him, the red in his tanned cheek deepened.

"As a matter of fact, parson," he explained, "somebody ought to do something for a woman that looks like that, and it might just as well be me. I 'm willing to pay good money to have my widow turn her mouth the other way up, and I hope she 'll buy a back-comb for those bangs on her neck."

"And all this," said I, "came out of one little wishin' curl, Butterfly Man?"

"But what else could I do?" he wondered, "when I 'm kin to Loujaney by bornation?" and to hide his feeling, he asked again:

"Now what are you going to do with yours?"

I reflected. I watched his clever, quizzical eyes, out of which the diamond-bright hardness had vanished, and into which I am sure that dear child's curl had wished this milder, clearer light.

"You want to know what I am going to do with mine?" said I, airily. "Well; as for me, the very first thing *I* am going to do is to purchase, in perpetuity, a fine new lamp for St. Stanislaus!"

CHAPTER XV

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

TIMID tentative rifts and wedges of blue had ventured back into the cold gray sky, and a stout-hearted robin or two heralded spring. One morning coming from mass I saw in the thin watery sunshine the painted wings of the Red Admiral flash by, and I welcomed him as one welcomes the long-missed face of a friend. I cannot choose but love the Red Admiral. He has always stirred my imagination, for frail as his gay wings are they have nevertheless borne this dauntless small Columbus of butterflies across unknown seas and around uncharted lands, until like his twin-sister the Painted Lady he has all but circled the globe. A few days later a handful of those gold butterflies that resemble nothing so much as new bright dandelions in the young grass, dared the unfriendly days before their time as if to coax the lagging spring to follow.

The sad white streamers disappeared from doors and for a space the little white hearse ceased to go glimmering by. Then at many windows appeared small faces bearing upon them the mark of the valley of the shadow through which they had just passed. Although they were on side streets in the dingy mill district, far removed from our pleasant windows that looked out upon trees and flowers, all Appleboro was watching these wan visages with wiser and kinder eyes.

Perhaps the most potent single factor in the arousing of our civic conscience was a small person who might have justly thought we had n't any: I mean Loujaney's little ma, whose story had crept out and gone from lip to lip and from home to home, making an appeal to which there could be no refusal.

When Major Cartwright heard it, the high-hearted old rebel hurried over to the Parish House and thrust into my hand a lean roll of bills. And the major is by no means a rich man.

"It 's not tainted money," said the major, "though some mighty good Bourbon is goin' to turn into pap on account of it. However, it 's an ill wind that does n't blow somebody good—Marse Robert can come on back upstairs now an' thaw himself out while watchin' me read the Lamentations of Jeremiah—who was evidently sufferin' from a dry spell himself."

On the following Sunday the Baptist minister chose for his text that verse of Matthew which bids us take heed that we despise not one of these little ones because in heaven their angels do always behold the face of our Father. And then he told his people of that little one who had pretended to love dry bread when she could n't get any butter—in Appleboro. And who had gone to her rest holding to her thin breast a rag-doll that was kin to her by bornation, Loujaney being poor folks herself and knowing prezactly how 't was.

Over the heads of loved and sheltered children the Baptist brethren looked at each other. Of course, it was n't their fault any more than anybody else's.—In a very husky voice their pastor went on to tell them of the curl which the woman who had n't a God's thing left

to wish for had given as a remembrance to "that good and kind man, our brother John Flint, sometimes known as the Butterfly Man."

Dabney put the plain little discourse into print and heightened its effect by an editorial couched in the plainest terms. We were none of us in the humor to hear a spade called an agricultural implement just then, and Dabney knew it; particularly when the mill dividends and the cemetery both showed a marked increase.

Something had to be done, and quickly, but we didn't exactly know how nor where to begin doing it. Laurence, insisting that this was really everybody's business, called a mass-meeting at the schoolhouse, and the *Clarion* requested every man who didn't intend to bring his women-folks to that meeting to please stay home himself. Wherefore Appleboro town and county came with the wife of its bosom—or maybe the wife came and fetched it along.

Laurence called the meeting to order, and his manner of addressing the feminine portion of his audience would have made his gallant grandfather challenge him. He hadn't a solitary pretty phrase to tickle the ears of the ladies—he spoke of and to them as women.

"And did you see how they fell for him?" rejoiced the Butterfly Man, afterward. "From the kid in a middy up to the great old girl with three chins and a prow like an ocean liner, they were with him. When you 're in dead earnest, can the ladies; just go after women as women and they 're with you every time. They know."

A Civic Leaguer followed Laurence, then Madame, and after her a girl from the mills, whose two small brothers

went in one night. There were no set speeches. Everybody who spoke had something to say; and everybody who had something to say spoke. Then Westmoreland, who like Saul the king was taller by the head and shoulders than all Israel, bulked up big and good and begged us to remember that we could n't do anything of permanent value until we first learned how to reach those folks we had been ignoring and neglecting. He said gruffly that Appleboro had dumped its whole duty in this respect upon the frail shoulders of one old priest, and that the Guest Rooms were overworked. Did n't the town want to do its share now? The town voted, unanimously, that it did.

There was a pause. Laurence asked if anybody else had anything to say? Apparently, anybody else had n't.

"Well, then," said Laurence, smiling, "before we adjourn, is there anybody in particular that Appleboro County here assembled wants to hear?"

And at that came a sort of stir, a murmur, as of an immense multitude of bees:

"The Butterfly Man!" And louder: "The Butterfly Man!"

Followed a great hand-clapping, shrill whistles, the stamping of feet. And there he was, with Westmoreland and Laurence behind him as if to keep him from bolting. His face expressed a horrified astonishment. Twice, thrice, he opened his lips, and no words came. Then:

"I?" in a high and agonized falsetto.

"You!" Appleboro County settled back with rustles of satisfaction. "Speech! Speech!" From a corn-club man, joyfully.

"Oh, marmar, look! It 's the Butterfly Man, marmar!" squealed a child.

"A-a-h! Talk weeth us, Meester Fleent!" For the first time a "hand" felt that he might speak out openly in Appleboro.

John Flint stood there staring owlishly at all these people who ought to know very well that he had n't anything to say: what should he have to say? He was embarrassed; he was also most horribly frightened. But then, after all, they were n't anything but people, just folks like himself! When he remembered that his panic subsided. For a moment he reflected; as if satisfied, he nodded slightly and thrust his hand into his breast pocket.

"Instead of having to listen to me you 'd better just look at this," said the Butterfly Man. "Because this can talk louder and say more in a minute than I could between now and Judgment." And he held out Louisa's dear fair whimsy of a curl; the sort of curl mothers tuck behind a rosy ear of nights, and fathers lean to and kiss. "*I* have n't got anything to say," said the Butterfly Man. "The best I can do is just to wish for the children all that Louisa pretended to pull out of her wishin' curl —and never got. I wish on it that all the kids get a square deal—their chance to grow and play and be healthy and happy and make good. And I wish again," said the Butterfly Man, looking at his hearers with his steady eyes, "I wish that you folks, every God-blessed one of you, will help to make that wish come true, so far as lies in your power, from now until you die!" His funny, twisty smile flashed out. He put the fairy tress

back into his breast pocket, made a casual gesture to imply that he had concluded his wishes for the present; and walked off in the midst of the deepest silence that had ever fallen upon an Appleboro audience.

But however willing we might be, we discovered that we could not do things as quickly or as well as might be wished. People who wanted to help blundered tactlessly. People who wanted to be helped had to be investigated. People who ought to be helped were suspicious and resentful, could n't always understand or appreciate this sudden interest in their affairs, were inclined to slam doors, or, when cornered, to lie stolidly, with wooden faces and expressionless eyes.

Ensued an awkward pause, until the Butterfly Man came unobtrusively forward, discovering in himself that amazing diplomacy inherent in the Irish when they attend to anybody's business but their own. It was amusing to watch the only democrat in a solidly Democratic county infusing something of his own unabashed humanness into proceedings which but for him might have sloughed into

> Organized charity, carefully iced,
> In the name of a cautious, statistical Christ.

Having done what was to be done, he went about his own affairs. Nobody gushed over him, and he escaped that perilous popularity which is as a millstone around a man's neck. Nevertheless the Butterfly Man had stumbled upon the something divine in his fellows, and they entertained for him a feeling that was n't any more tangible, say, than pure air, and no more emotional than pure water, but was just about as vital and life-giving.

I was enchanted to have a whole county endorse my private judgment. I rose so in my own estimation that I fancy I was a bit condescending to St. Stanislaus! I was vain of the Butterfly Man's standing—folks could n't like him too much, to please me. And I was greatly interested in the many invitations that poured in upon him, invitations that ranged all the way from a birthday party at Michael Karski's to a state dinner at the Eustis's.

From Michael's he came home gaily, a most outrageous posy pinned upon him by way of honor, and whistling a Slavic love song so dismal that one inferred love must be something like toothache for painfulness. He had had such a bully time, he told me. Big Jan had been there with his wife, an old friend of Michael's Katya. Although pale, and still somewhat shaky as to legs, Jan had willingly enough shaken hands with his conqueror.

It seemed quite right and natural that he and Jan should presently enter into a sort of Dual Alliance. Meester Fleent was to be Arbitrator Extraordinary. When he stipulated that thereafter Big Jan was only to tackle a man his own size, everybody cheered madly, and Mrs. Jan herself beamed red-eyed approval. She said her prayers to the man who had trounced Jan into righteousness.

But from the Eustis dinner, to which he went with my mother, he came home somber and heavy-hearted. Laurence was conspicuously absent; it is true he was away, defending his first big case in another part of the State. But Mr. George Inglesby was just as conspicuously present, apparently on the best of all possible terms with himself, the world in general, and Mrs. James

Eustis in particular. His presence in that house, in the face of persistent rumors, made at least two guests uneasy. Mrs. Eustis showed him a most flattering attention. She was deeply impressed by him. He had just aided her pet mission in China—what he had given the heathen would have buttered my children's bread for many a day. Also, he was all but lyrical in his voicing of the shibboleth that Woman's Sphere is the Home, wherein she should be adored, enshrined, and protected. Woman and the Home! All the innate chivalry of Southern manhood—

I don't know that Louisa's Ma was ever enshrined or protected by the chivalry of any kind of manhood, no, nor any of the mill women. Their kind don't know the word. But Mrs. Eustis was, and she agreed with Mr. Inglesby's noble sentiments.

"Parson, you should have heard him!" raved the Butterfly Man. "There 's a sort of man down here that 's got chivalry like another sort 's got hookworm, and he makes the man that has n't got either want to set up an image to the great god Dam!

"You 'd think being chivalrous would be enough for him, would n't you?" continued the Butterfly Man, bitterly. "Nix! What 's he been working the heavy charity lay for, except that it 's his turn to be a misunderstood Christian? Does n't charity cover a multitude of skins, though? And does n't it beat a jimmy when it comes to breaking into society!"

Mary Virginia, he added in an altered voice, had been exquisite in a frock all silver lace and shimmery stuffs like moonbeams, and with a rope of pearls about her throat, and in her black hair. Appleboro folks do not

affect orchids, but Mary Virginia wore a huge cluster of those exotics. She had been very gracious to the Butterfly Man and Madame. But only for a brief bright minute had she been the Mary Virginia they knew. All the rest of the evening she seemed to grow statelier, colder, more dazzlingly and imperially regal. And her eyes were like frozen sapphires under her level brows, and her mouth was the red splendid bow of Pride.

Watching her, my mother was pained and puzzled; as for the Butterfly Man, his heart went below zero. Those who loved Mary Virginia had cause for painful reflections.

Blinded by her beauty, were we judging her by the light of affection, instead of the colder light of reason? We could n't approve of her behavior to Laurence, nor was it easy to refrain from disapproval of what appeared to be a tacit endurance of Inglesby's attention. She could n't plead ignorance of what was open enough to be town talk—the man's shameless passion for herself, a passion he seemed to take delight in flaunting. And she made no effort to explain; she seemed deliberately to exclude her old friends from the confidence once so freely given. She had n't visited the Parish House since she had broken her engagement.

And all the while the spring that had n't time for the little concerns of mortals went secretly about her immortal business of rejuvenation. The blue that had been so timid and so tentative overspread the sky; more robins came, and after them bluebirds and redbirds and Peterbirds, and the impudent screaming robber jay that is so beautiful and so bold, and flute-voiced vireos, and nut-

hatches, and the darling busybody wren fussing about her house-building in the corners of our piazzas. The first red flowers of the Japanese quince opened flame-like on the bare brown bushes. When the bridal-wreath by the gate saw that, she set industriously to work upon her own wedding-gown. The yellow jessamine was full of waxy gold buds; and long since those bold frontiersmen of the year, the Judas-trees, had flaunted it in bravest scarlet, and the slim-legged scouts of the pines showed shoulder-straps and cockades of new gay green above gallant brown leggings.

One brand new morning the Butterfly Man called me aside and placed in my hands a letter. The American Society of Natural History invited Mr. John Flint, already a member of the Entomological Society of France, a Fellow of the Entomological Society of London, and a member of the greatest of Dutch and German Associations, to speak before it and its guests, at a most notable meeting to be held in the Society's splendid Museum in New York City. Not to mention two mere ex-Presidents, some of the greatest scientific names of the Americas were included in that list. And it was before such as these that my Butterfly Man was to speak. Behold me rocking on my toes!

The first effect of this invitation was to please me immensely, I being a puffed-up old man and carnal-minded at times; nor do I seem to improve with age. The plaudits of the world, for anybody I admire and love, ring most sweetly in my foolish ears. Now the honors he had gotten from abroad were fine and good in their way, but this meant that the value of his work was rec-

ognized and his position established in his own country, in his own time. It meant a widening of his horizon, association with clever men and women, ennobling friendships to broaden his life. A just measure of appreciation from the worthwhile sweetens toil and encourages genius. And yet—our eyes met, and mine had to ask an old question.

"Would you better accept it?" I wondered.

"I can't afford not to," said he resolutely. "The time 's come for me to get out in the open, and I might just as well face the music, and Do it Now. Risks? I hardly think so. I never hunted in couples, remember —I always went by my lonesome and got away with it. Besides, who 's remembering Slippy? Nobody. He 's drowned and dead and done with. But, however, and nevertheless, and because, I shall go."

Again we looked at each other; and his look was untroubled.

"The pipe-dreams I 've had about slipping back into little old New York! But if anybody had told me I 'd go back like I 'm going, with the sort of folks waiting for me that will be waiting now, I 'd have passed it up. Well, you never can tell, can you? And in a way it 's funny—now is n't it?"

"No, you never can tell," said I, soberly. "But I do not think it at all funny. Quite the contrary." Suppose, oh, suppose, that after all these years, when a well-earned success was in his grasp, it should happen—

I turned pale. He read my fear in my face and his smile might have been borrowed from my mother's mouth.

"Don't you get cold feet, parson," he counseled kindly. "Be a sport! Besides, it 's all in the Game, you know."

"Is it?"

"Sure!"

"And worth while, John?"

He laughed. "Believe me! It 's the worthwhilest thing under the sun to sit in the Game, with a sport's interest in the hands dealt out, taking yours as it comes to you, bluffing all you can when you 've got to, playing your cards for all they 're worth when it 's your turn. No reneging. No squealing when you lose. No boasting how you did it when you win. There 's nothing in the whole universe so intensely and immensely worth while as being *you* and alive, with yourself the whole kitty and the sky your limit! It 's one great old Game, and I 'm for thanking the Big Dealer that I 'd a whack at playing it." And his eyes snapped and his lean brown face flushed.

"And you are really willing to—to stake yourself now, my son?"

"Lord, parson, you ought to know! And you a dead ringer for the real thing in a classy sport yourself!"

"My *dear* son—!"

My dear son waved his fine hand, and chuckled in his red beard.

"Would *you* back down if this was your call? Why, you 're the sort that would tackle the biggest noise in the ring, even if you knew you 'd be dragged out on your pantry in the first half of the first round, if you thought you 'd got holy orders to do it! If you saw me getting jellyfish of the spine now, you 'd curl up and die—

would n't you, honest Injun?" His eyes crinkled and he grinned so infectiously that my fears subsided. I had an almost superstitious certainty that nothing really evil could happen to a man who could grin like that. Fate and fortune are perfectly powerless before the human being who can meet them with the sword of a smile.

"Well," I admitted cautiously, "jellyfish of the spine must be an unlovely ailment; not that I ever heard of it before."

"You 're willing for me to go, then?"

"You 'd go anyhow, would you not?"

"Forget it!" said he roughly. "If you think I 'd do anything I knew would cause you uneasiness, you 've got another think coming to you."

"Oh, go, for heaven's sake!" said I, sharply.

"All right. I 'll go for heaven's sake," he agreed cheerfully. "And now it 's formally decided I 'm to go, and talk, the question arises—what they really want me to talk about? *I* don't know how to deal in glittering generalities. A chap on the trail of truth has got to let generalities go by the board. The minute he tackles the living Little People he chucks theories and bucks conditions.

"Suppose I tell the truth as I see it: that most so-called authorities are like cats chasing their tails—because they accept theories that have never been really proven, run after them, and so never get anywhere? And that facts dug up in the open under the sunlight don't always fit in with notions hatched out in libraries under the electric light?

"Suppose I say that after they 've run everything

down to that plasma they 're so fond of beginning and ending with, there is still something behind it all their theories can't explain away? Protoplasm doesn't explain Life any more than the battery explains electricity. Instinct? Evolution? The survival of the fittest? Well, nothing is tagged for fair, and I 'm more than willing to be shown. For the more I find out from the living things themselves,—you can't get truth from death, you 've got to get it from life—the more self-evident it seems to me that to exist at all insects must have arrived on the scene complete, handfinished, with the union label of the Great Workshop on them by way of a trade-mark."

"As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, one God, world without end, Amen!" said I, smiling. I have never thought it necessary to explain or excuse the Creator. God is; things are.

But he shook his head, wrinkling his forehead painfully. "I wish I *knew*," said he, wistfully. "You 're satisfied to believe, but I have got to know. Oh, great Power behind Things, I want to know! I want to *know!*"

Ah, but I also do most passionately wish to know! If, however, the Insect has taught me anything in my lifelong study of it, it is to recognize the Unknowable, to know there is that which I cannot hope to know. But if under the law of its world, so different from ours and yet so alike because so inevitable, the Insect must move in a fixed circle within which it is safe, a circle whose very limitation preserves it from error and thus from destruction, may not a like fixed circle beyond which *we* may not penetrate preserve us, too? Are these mountain

peaks of the Unknowable, the Impassable, which encompass the skyline of our humanity, these heights so mysterious and so unscalable, not rather bulwarks between man's pride and the abyss?

Something of this I said to the Butterfly Man, and he nodded, but did not answer. He fell into a brown study; then plunged from the room without further look or word and made for his own desk. I was not afraid of what the Butterfly Man, fresh from little Appleboro's woods and fields, would have to say to the scholars and scientists gathered to hear him!

Apparently he was not either, for after he had gotten a few notes together he wisely turned the whole affair over to that mysterious Self that does our work and solves our problems for us. On the surface he busied himself with a paper setting forth the many reasons why the County of Appleboro should appropriate adequate funds for a common dipping vat, and hurried this to Dabney, who was holding open a space in the *Clarion* for it. Then there were new breeding cages to be made, for the supply of eggs and cocoons on hand would require additional quarters, once they began to emerge.

By the Saturday he had finished all this; and as I had that afternoon free we spent some beautiful hours with the microscope and slide mounts. I completed, too, the long delayed drawings of some diurnal wasp-moths and their larvæ. We worked until my mother interrupted us with a summons to an early dinner, for Saturday evening belongs to the confessional and I was shortly due at the church.

I left Flint with Madame and Miss Sally Ruth, who had run over after the neighborly Appleboro wont with

a plate of fresh sponge-cake and a bowl of fragrant custard. Miss Sally Ruth is nothing if not generous, but there are times when one could wish upon her the affliction of dumbness. As I slipped into my cassock in the study, I could hear her uplifted voice, a voice so insistent and so penetrating that it can pierce closed doors and come through a ceiling:

"I declare to goodness, I don't know what to believe any more! She 's got money enough in her own right, has n't she? For heaven's sake, then, why should she marry for more money? But you never really know people, do you? Why, folks say—"

I hurried out of the house and ran the short distance to the church. I wished I had n't heard; I wished Miss Sally Ruth, good as she is, would sometimes hold her tongue. She will set folks by the ears in heaven some of these days if she does n't mend her ways before she gets there.

It must have been all of ten o'clock when I got back to the Parish House. Madame had retired; John Flint's rooms were dark. The night itself was dark, though in between the clouds that a brisk wind pulleyhauled about the skies, one saw many stars.

Too tired to sleep, I sat beside my window and breathed the repose that lay like a benediction upon the little city. I found myself praying; for Mary Virginia, whom I loved and over whom I was sorely troubled; for Laurence, even now walking such a road as I also once had to travel with feet as young but no more steadfast; and then with a thankfulness too deep for words, I thought a prayer for the Butterfly Man. So thinking and so praying, with a glow in my heart because of him,

I closed my window, and crept into bed and into sleep.

I awoke with a start. Somebody was in the room. There was an urgent voice whispering my name, an urgent hand upon me. A pocket light flashed, and in its pale circle appeared the face of John Flint.

"Get up!" said he in an intense whisper. "And come. Come!"

"Why, what in the name of heaven—"

"Don't make a row!" he snarled, and brought his face close. "Here—let me help you. Heaven, man, how slow you are!" With furious haste he forced my clothes upon me and even as I mechanically struggled to adjust them he was hustling me toward the door, through the dark hall, and down the stairs.

"Easy there—careful of that step!" he breathed in my ear, guiding me.

"But what is the matter?" I whispered back impatiently. I do not relish mystery and I detest being led willynilly.

"In my rooms," said he briefly, and hustled me across the garden on the double run, I with my teeth chattering, for I had been dragged out of my sleep, and the night air was cold.

He fairly lifted me up his porch-steps, unlocked his door, and pushed me inside. With the drawn shades and the flickering firelight, the room was peaceful and pleasant enough. Then Kerry caught my astonished gaze, for the dog stood statue-like beside the Morris chair, and when I saw what Kerry guarded I crossed myself. Sunk into the chair, the Butterfly Man's old gray overcoat partly around her, was Mary Virginia.

At my involuntary exclamation she raised her head

and regarded me. A great sigh welled from her bosom and I could see her eyes dilate and her lips quiver.

"Padre, Padre!" Down went her head, and she began to cry childishly, with sobs.

I watched her helplessly, too bewildered to speak. But the other man's face was the face of one crucified. I saw his eyes, and something I had been all too blind to rushed upon me overwhelmingly. This, then, was what had driven him forth for a time, this was what had left its indelible imprint upon him! He had hung upon his cross and I had not known. Oh, Butterfly Man, I had not known!

"She 'll be able to talk to you in a few minutes now, parson." He was so perfectly unconscious of himself that he had no idea he had just made mute confession. He added, doubtfully: "She said she had to come to you, about something—I don't know what. It 's up to you to find out—she 's got to talk to you, parson."

"But—I wanted to talk to you, Padre. That 's why I—ran away from home in the middle of the night." She sat suddenly erect. "I just could n't stand things, any more—by myself—"

Gone was the fine lady, the great beauty, the proud jilt who had broken Laurence's heart and maddened and enslaved Inglesby. Here was only a piteous child with eyes heavy from weeping, with a pale and sad face and drooping childish lips. And yet she was so dear and so lovely, for all her reddened eyelids and her reddened little nose, that one could have wept with her. The Butterfly Man, with an intake of breath, stood up.

"I shall leave you with the Padre now," he said evenly, "to tell him what you wanted to tell him.

Father, understand: there 's something rotten wrong, as I 've been telling you all along. Now she 's got to tell you what it is and all about it. Everything. Whether she likes to or not, and no matter what it is, she 's got to tell you. You understand that, Mary Virginia?''

She fixed him with a glance that had in it something hostile and oblique. Even with those dearest of women whom I adore, there are moments when I have the impression that they have, so to speak, their ears laid back flat, and I experience what I may justly term cat-fear. I felt it then.

''Oh, don't have too much consideration for my feelings, Mr. Flint!'' said she, with that oblique and baffling glance, and the smile Old Fitz once likened to the Curve in the Cat's Tail. ''Indeed, why should you go? Why don't you stay and find out *why* I wanted to run to the Padre—to beg him to find some way to help me, since I can't fall like a plum into Mr. Inglesby's hand when Mr. Hunter shakes the Eustis family tree!''

His breath came whistlingly between his teeth.

''Parson! You hear?'' he slapped his leg with his open palm. ''Oh, I knew it, I knew it!'' And he turned upon her a kindling glance:

''I knew all along it was never in you to be anything but true!'' said the Butterfly Man.

CHAPTER XVI

"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR"

IT is impossible for me to put down in her own words what Mary Virginia told the Butterfly Man and me. Also, I have had to fill in gaps here and there, supplying what was lacking, from my intimate knowledge of the actors and from such chance words and hints and bits of detail as came to me afterward. But what I have added has been necessary, in order to do greater justice to everybody concerned.

If it be true that the boy is father to the man, it is even more tritely true that the girl is mother to the woman, there being here less chance for change. So it was with Mary Virginia. That gracious little girlhood of hers, lived among the birds and bees and blossoms of an old Carolina garden, had sent her into the Church School with a settled and definite idealism as part of her nature. Her creed was simple enough: The world she knew was the best of all possible worlds, its men good, its women better; and to be happy and loved one had only to be good and loving.

The school did not disabuse her of this pleasing optimism. It was a very expensive school and could afford to have optimisms of its own. For one thing, it had no pupils poor enough to apply the acid test.

When Mary Virginia was seventeen, Mrs. Eustis perceived with dismay that her child who had promised

beauty was instead become angular, awkward, and self-conscious; and promptly packed the unworldly one off to spend a saving summer with a strenuously fashionable cousin, a widow, of whom she herself was very fond. She liked the idea of placing the gauché girl under so vigorous and seasoned a wing as Estelle Baker's. As for Mrs. Baker herself, that gay and good-humored lady laughed at the leggy and serious youngster and promptly took her education in hand along lines not laid down in Church Schools.

Mrs. Baker was delighted with her own position—the reasonably young, handsome, and wealthy widow of a man she had been satisfied to marry and later to bury. She had an unimpaired digestion and no illusions, a kind heart, and the power of laughter. Naturally, she found life interesting. A club-woman, an ultra-modernist, vitally alive, she was fully abreast of her day. Her small library skimmed the cream of the insurgents and revolutionaries of genius; and here the shy and reticent schoolgirl with the mark of the churchly checkrein fresh upon her, was free to browse, for her cousin had no slightest notion of playing censor. Mrs. Baker thought that the sooner one was allowed to slough off the gaucheries of the Young Person, the better. She did not gauge the real and tumultuous depths of feeling concealed under the young girl's simplicity.

The revolutionaries and the insurgent and free poets didn't trouble Mary Virginia very much. Although she sensed that something was wrong with somebody somewhere—hence these lyrical lamentations—she could not, to save her, tell what all the pother was about, for as yet she saw the world *couleur de rose*. Some one or

two of the French and Germans pleased her; she fell into long reveries over the Gael, who has the sound of the sea in his voice and whose eyes are full of a haunting light, as of sunsets upon graves. But it was the Russians who electrified and dazzled her. When she glimpsed with her eyes of a young girl those strange souls simple as children's and yet mosaiced with unimaginable and barbarous splendors, she stood blinking and half blinded, awed, fascinated, and avid to know more of that sky-scaling passion with which they burned.

And in that crucial moment she chanced upon the "Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff," so frank and so astounding that it took her breath away and swept her off her feet. She was stirred into a vague and trembling expectancy; she had the sense of waiting for something to happen. Life instantly became more colorful and more wonderful than she had dreamed could be possible, and she wished passionately to experience all these emotions, so powerful and so poignant. The Russian's morbid and disease-bright genius acted upon her as with the force and intensity of a new and potent toxin. She could not lay the book aside, but carried it up to her room to be pored and pondered over. She failed to understand that, untried as she was, it was impossible for her to understand it. Had the book come later, it had been harmless enough; but it came at a most critical moment of that seething period when youth turns inward to question the universe, and demands that the answer shall be personal to itself. The first long ground-swell of awakening emotion swept over her, sitting in the pleasant chintz-hung room, with the Russian woman's wild and tameless heart beating through the book open upon her

knees. And these waves of emotion that at recurrent intervals surge over the soul, come from the shores of a farther country than any earthly seas have touched, and recede to depths so profound that only the eyes of God may follow their ebb and flow.

Mrs. Baker, however, saw nothing about which to give herself any concern. If she perceived the girl intense and preoccupied, she smiled indulgently—at Mary Virginia's age one is apt to be like that, and one recovers from that phase as one gets over mumps and measles. Mrs. Baker did think it advisable, though, to subtly detach the girl from books for awhile. She amused herself by allowing her wide-eyed glimpses of the larger life of grown-ups, by way of arousing and initiation. Thus it happened that one afternoon at the country-club, where Mary Virginia, at the green-fruit stage, found herself playing gooseberry instead of golf, Mrs. Baker sauntered up with a tall and very blonde man.

"Here," said she gaily, indicating with a wave of her hand her sulky-eyed young cousin, "is a marvel and a wonder—a girl who accepts on faith everything and everybody! My dear Howard, in all probability she will presently even believe in *you!*" With that she left them, whisked off by a waiting golfer.

The man and the girl appraised each other. The man saw young bread-and-butter with the raw sugar of beauty sprinkled upon it promisingly. What the girl saw was not so much a faultlessly groomed and handsome man as the most beautiful person in the world. And suddenly she was aware that that for which she had been waiting had come. Something divine and wonderful was happening, and there was fire before her eyes and the

noise of unloosed winds and great waters in her ears, and her knees trembled and her heart fluttered. A vivid red flamed into her pale cheeks, a soft and trembling light suffused her blue eyes. That happens when the sweet and virginal freshness of youth is brought face to face with the bright shadow of love.

He drew her out of her shyness and made her laugh, and after awhile, when there was dancing, he danced with her. He did not behave to her as other men of Estelle's acquaintance had more than once behaved—as though they bestowed the lordly honor of their society upon her out of the sheer goodness of their hearts and their desire to please Mrs. Baker. Mary Virginia was uncompromising and stiff-necked enough then, and she bored most of her cousin's friends unconsciously. Now this man, as much their superior as the sun is to farthing dips, was exerting himself to please her. That was the one thing Mary Virginia needed to arouse her.

Mrs. Baker admired Mr. Hunter for a grace of manner almost Latin in its charm. If at times he puzzled her, he at least never bored her or anybody else, and for this she praised him in the gates. Her respect for him deepened when she perceived that he never allowed himself to be absorbed or monopolized.

The pleasant widow did not take him too seriously. She only asked that he amuse and interest her. He did both, to a superlative degree. That is why and how he saw so much of the school-girl cousin whose naïvete made him smile, it was so absurdly sincere.

Mrs. Baker was glad enough to have Howard take her charge off her hands occasionally. She thought contact with this fine pagan an excellent thing for the girl who

took herself so seriously. She was really fond of Mary Virginia, but she must have found her hand-grenade directness a bit disconcerting at times. She wanted the child's visit to be pleasant, and she considered it very amiable of Howard to help her make it so. She had no faintest notion of danger—to her Mary Virginia was nothing but a child, a little girl one indulged with pickles and pound-cake and the bliss of staying up later than the usual bedtime. As for Hunter, his was the French attitude toward the Young Person; she had heard him say he preferred his flowers in full bloom and his fruit ripe—one then knows what one is getting; one isn't deceived by canker in the closed bud and worm in the green fruit. No, Howard wasn't the sort that hankered for verjuice.

None the less, although Mrs. Baker didn't know it, Mary Virginia was engaged to the godlike Howard when she returned to school. It was to be a state secret until after she was graduated, and in the meantime he was to "make himself worthier of her love." She hadn't any notion he could be improved upon, but it pleased her to hear him say that. Humility in the superman is the ultimate proof of perfection.

The maid who attended her room at school arranged for the receipt of his letters and mailed Mary Virginia's. The maid was sentimental, and delighted to play a part smacking of those dime novels she spoiled her brains with.

The little schoolgirl who was in love with love, and secretly betrothed to a man who had stepped alive out of old knightly romance, walked in the Land of April Rainbows and felt the whole joyous universe suffused

with a delicious and quivering glow of light and sound and scent. Surcharged with an emotion that she was irresistibly urged to express, and unable to do so by word of mouth, she was driven to the necessity of putting it down on paper for him. And she put it down in the burning words, the fiery phrases, of those anarchists of art who had intoxicated and obsessed her.

Just a little later,—even a year later—and Mary Virginia could never have written those letters. But now, very ignorant, very innocent, very impassioned, she accomplished a miracle. She was like one speaking an unknown tongue, perfectly sure that the spirit moved her, but quite unable to comprehend what it was that it moved her to say.

When Mrs. Baker insisted that her young cousin should come back to her for the Christmas holidays, the girl was more than eager to go. Seeing him again only deepened her infatuation.

That holiday visit was an unusually gay one, for Mrs. Baker was really fond of Mary Virginia—the young girl's tenderness and simplicity touched the woman of the world. She gave a farewell dance the night before Mary Virginia was to return to school. It was an informal affair, with enough college boys and girls to lend it a junior air, but there was a goodly sprinkling of grown-ups to deepen it, for the hostess said frankly that she simply could n't stand the Very Young except in broken doses and in bright spots.

Hunter, of course, was to be one of the grownups. He had sent Mary Virginia the flowers she was to wear. And she had a new dancing frock, quite the loveliest and fluffiest and laciest she had ever worn.

He was somewhat late. And so engrossed with him were all her thoughts, so eager was she to see him, that she was a disappointing companion for anybody else. She could n't talk to anybody else. She flitted in and out of laughing groups like a blue-and-silver butterfly, and finally managed to slip away to the stair nook behind what Mrs. Baker liked to call the conservatory. This was merely a portion of the big back hall glassed in and hung with a yellow silk curtain; it had a tiny round crystal fountain in the center and one or two carved seats, but one would n't think so small a space could hold so much bloom and fragrance. From the nook where Mary Virginia sat, one could hear every word spoken in the flower-room, though the hearer remained hidden by the paneled stairway.

Hands in her lacy lap, eyes abstracted, she fell into the dreams that youth dreams; in which a girl—one's self, say,—walks hand in hand through an enchanted world with a being very, very little lower than the angels and twice as dear. They are such innocent dreams, such impossible dreams, so untouched of all reality; but I wonder, oh I wonder, if life can ever give us anything to repay their loss!

Somebody spoke in the conservatory and she looked up, startled. Through a parting in the silk curtain she glimpsed the woman and recognized one of Estelle's friends, handsome and fashionable, but a woman she had never liked.

"You provoke me. You try my patience too much!" she was saying, in a tone of suppressed anger. "People are beginning to say that you have a serious affair with that sugar-candy chit. I want to know if that is true?"

The man laughed, a lazy, pleasant, disarming laugh. She knew that laugh among a million, and her heart began to beat, but not with doubt or distrust. She wondered how she had missed him, and if he had been looking for her; she thought of the exquisite secret that bound them together, and wondered how he was going to protect it without evasions or untruthfulness. And she thought the woman abominable.

"You 're so suspicious, Evie!" he said smilingly. "Why bother about what can give you no real concern? Why discuss it here, at all? It 's not the thing, really."

The woman stamped her foot. She had an able-bodied temper.

"I will know, and I will know now. I have to know," said she, and her voice shook. Mary Virginia would have coughed then, would have made her presence known had she been able; but something held her silent. "Remember, you 're not dealing with a love-sick school-girl now, Howard: you are dealing with *me*. Have you made that little fool think you 're in love with her?"

"Why, and what then?" he asked coolly. "I like the child. Of course she is without form and void as yet, but there 's quite a lot to that girl."

"Oh, yes! Quite a lot!" said she, with sarcasm. "That 's what made me take notice. James Eustis's girl—and barrels of money. She 'll be a catch. You are clever, Howard! But what of *me?*"

Mary Virginia's heart fluttered. Indeed, what of this other woman?

"Oh, well, there 's nothing definite yet, Evie," said he soothingly. A hint of impatience was betrayed in his voice. Plainly, it irked him to be held up and ques-

tioned point-blank, at such a time and place. Just as plainly, he wished to conciliate his jealous questioner. "My dear girl, it would be all of two or three years before the affair could be considered. Let well enough alone, Evie. Let 's talk about something else."

"No. We will talk about this. You are offering me a two or three years' reprieve, are you not? Well, and then?"

"Well, and then suppose I do marry the little thing,—if she has n't changed her little mind?" said he, exasperated into punishing her. "It would n't be a bad thing for me, remember, and she 's temptingly easy to deal with—that girl has more faith than the twelve apostles. Heavens, Evie, don't look like that! My dearest girl, *you* don't have to worry, anyhow. If your—er—impediment has n't stood in my way, why should mine in yours?"

He spoke with a half-impatient, half-playful reproach. The woman uttered a little cry. To soothe and silence her, he kissed her. It was very risky, of course, but then the whole situation was risky, and he took his chance like the bold player he was. The girl crouching behind the paneled wall clenched her hands in her lap, felt her heart and brain on fire, and wondered why the sky did not fall upon the world and blot it out.

When those two had left the conservatory and she could command her trembling limbs and whip her senses back into some semblance of order, she went upstairs and got his letters. When she came downstairs again he was standing in the hall, and he came forward eager, smiling, tender, as if his heart welcomed her; as perhaps it did, men having catholic hearts. She put her hand on

his arm and whispered: "Come into the conservatory."

The hall was quite empty. From drawing-room and library and dining-room came the laughter and chatter of many people. Then the music struck up a gay and popular air. The lilt and swing of it made her giddy. But the little flower-room was cool and sweet, and she drew a breath of relief.

Hunter bent his fair head, but she pushed him away with her hands against his chest. A horror of his beauty, his deliberate fascination, the falseness of him, came over her. For the first time she had been brought face to face with sin and falsehood, and hers was the unpardoning white condemnation of an angel to whom sin is unknown and falsehood impossible. That such knowledge should have come through him of all men made the thing more unbearable. Surprised and irritated by the pale tragedy of her aspect, Hunter stared, waiting for her to speak.

"I was on the stairs. I heard you—and that woman," said she with the directness that was sometimes so appalling. "And I *know*." Her face turned burning red before it paled again. She was ashamed for him with the noble shame of the pure in heart.

His face, too, went red and white with rage and astonishment. It was a damnable trap for a man to be caught in, and he was furious with the two women who had pushed him into it—he could have beaten them both with rods. Innocent as this girl was, he could not hope to deceive her as to the real truth. She had heard too much. But he thought he could manage her; women were as wax in Hunter's hands. To begin with, they *wanted* to believe him.

"I hate to have to say it—but the lady is jealous," he said frankly enough, with a disarming smile; and shrugged his shoulders, quite as if that simple statement explained and excused everything.

"Oh, she need not be afraid—of me!" said the girl, with white-hot scorn. "I 'd rather die by inches of leprosy than belong to you now. You are clever, though. And I *was* easy to deal with, was n't I? And I cared so much! I dare say it was really your hair and beard, but I honestly thought you a sort of Archangel! Well, you 're not. You 're not anything I thought you—not good nor kind nor honorable nor truthful—not anything but just a rather paltry sort of liar. You 're not even loyal to *her*. I think I could respect you more if you were. But I *am* James Eustis's girl—and that 's my salvation, Mr. Hunter. Please take your letters. You will send me back mine to-morrow."

He stroked his short gold beard. The color had come back into his face and a new light flashed into his cold blue eyes. He laughed. "Why, you game little angel!" he said delightedly. "Gad, I never thought you had it in you—never. I begin to adore you, Mary Virginia, upon my soul I do! Now listen to reason, my too-good child, and don't be so puritanical. You 've got to take folks as they are and not as you 'd like them to be, you know. Men are not angels, no, nor women, either. You must learn to be charitable—a virtue very good people seldom practice and never properly appreciate." And he added, leaning lower: "Mary Virginia! Give me another chance . . . you won't be sorry, Ladybird."

But she stood unmoved, stonily silent, holding out the letters. And when he still ignored this silent insistence, she thrust them into his hands and left him.

Mary Virginia was to go back to school the next night. All day she waited for her letters. Instead came a note and a huge bunch of violets. The note said he could n't allow those precious letters which meant so much to him to pass even into her hands who had written them. When he could summon up the courage, he would presently destroy them himself. And she had treated him with great harshness, and would n't she be a good little girl and let him see her, if only for a few minutes, before she went away?

Mary Virginia tore up the note and returned the violets by way of answer.

When she returned to school, the superioress regretted that she had been allowed to visit Mrs. Baker again, because too much gaiety was n't good for her, and she was falling off in her studies. The other girls said she had lost all her looks, for in truth she was wan and peaked and hollow-eyed. Seventeen suffers frightfully, when it suffers at all. Eighteen enjoys its blighted affection, revels in its broken heart, would like to crochet a black edging on its immortal soul, and would n't exchange its secret sorrow for a public joy. Nineteen is convalescent—pride would come to its rescue even if life itself did not beguile it into being happy.

Mary Virginia got back her color and her appetite and forgot to remember that her heart was incurably broken and that she could never love again. She liked to think her painful experience had made her very wise. Then she went abroad, and her cure was complete. The result of it all was that poise and pride which had so greatly delighted the autocratic old kinswoman whose fiat had set the last seal of social success upon her.

When one of life's little jokes flung Hunter into Appleboro and she had to observe him with impartial and less ingenuous eyes, she forgave the simple schoolgirl's natural mistake. He had not changed, and she perceived his effect upon others older and wiser than herself. And her pride chose neither to slight nor to ignore him now, but rather to meet him casually, with indifference, as a stranger in whom she was not at all interested.

Mr. Inglesby she did not take seriously. She did not dream that a possible menace to herself lay in this stout man whom she considered fatuous and absurd, when she thought of him at all. That her mother should be completely taken in by his specious charity and his plausible presentment of himself, did not surprise her. She was inclined to smile scornfully and so dismiss him.

She underestimated Inglesby.

The very fact that there was such an obstacle in the way as a young fellow with whom she fancied herself in love only deepened Inglesby's passion for Mary Virginia. She was in her proper person all that he coveted and groveled to. To possess her in addition to his own wealth—what more could a man ask? Let Eustis become senator, governor, president, anything he chose. But let Inglesby have Mary Virginia by way of fair exchange.

Mr. Inglesby was well aware that Miss Eustis would not for one moment consider him—unless she had to. He proposed to so arrange affairs that she had to. Naturally, he looked to his private secretary to help him bring about this desirable end. And at this opportune moment fate played into his hands in a manner that left Mr. Hunter's assent a matter of course.

Mr. Hunter had very expensive tastes which his salary

was not always sufficient to cover. Wherefore, like many another, he speculated. When he was lucky, it was easy money; but it was never enough. Of late he had not been fortunate, and he found himself confronted by the high cost of living as he chose to live. This annoyed him. So when there came his way what appeared to be an absolute certainty of not only recouping all his losses but of making some real money as well, Hunter plunged, with every dollar he could manage to get hold of. But Wall Street is a lane that has many crooked and devious turnings, and Mr. Hunter's investments took a very wrong turn. And this time it was not only all his own money that had been lost. The bottom might have dropped out of things then, except for Inglesby.

When Hunter had to tell him the truth the financier listened with an unmoved face. Then he swung around in his chair, lifted an eyebrow, grunted, and remarked briefly: "Very unsafe thing to do, Hunter. Very." And shoved his personal check across the desk. Nobody knew anything about it, except the head bookkeeper of the bank.

Inglesby had no illusions, however. He understood that to have in his power an immensely clever man who knew as much about his private affairs as Hunter did, was good business, to say the least. He simply invested in Mr. Hunter's brains and personality for his own immediate ends, and he expected his brilliant and expensive secretary to prove the worth of the investment.

Inglesby had not risen to his present heights by beating about the bush in his dealings with others. He had seized Success by the windpipe and throttled it into obedience, and he ruthlessly bent everything and every-

body to his own purposes. The task he set before Hunter now was to steer the Inglesby ship through a perilous passage into the matrimonial harbor he had in mind. Let Hunter do that—no matter how—and the pilot's future was assured. Inglesby would be no niggardly rewarder. But let the venture come to shipwreck and Hunter must go down with it. Hunter was not left in any doubt upon that score.

Brought face to face with the situation as it affected his fortune and misfortune, Hunter must have had a very bad half an hour. I am sure he had not dreamed of such a contretemps, and he must have been startled and amazed by the cold calculation and the raw fury of passion he had to deal with. I do not think he relished his task. His was the sort of conscience that would dislike such a course, not because it was dishonorable or immoral in itself, but because its details offended his fastidiousness. I think he would have extricated himself honorably if he could. It just happened that he could n't.

Give a sufficient shock to a man's pocket-nerve and you electrify his brain-cells, which automatically receive orders to work overtime. Hunter's brain worked then because it had to, self-preservation being the first law of nature. And this service for Inglesby not only spelt safety; it meant the golden key to the heights, the power to gratify those fine tastes which only a rich and able man can afford. Inglesby had promised that, and he had just had a fair example of what Inglesby's support meant.

One must try to consider the case from Mr. Hunter's point of view. To refuse Inglesby meant disaster. And

who was Laurence, who was Mary Virginia, that he should quixotically wreck his prospects for them? Why should he lose Inglesby's goodwill or gain Inglesby's enmity for them or anybody else? Forced to choose, Hunter made the only choice possible to him.

Væ victis!

CHAPTER XVII

"—SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY—"

NOW I am only an old priest and no business-man, so of course I do not know just how Hunter was set like a hound upon the track of those circumstances that, properly manipulated, helped him toward a solution of his problem—the getting of a girl apparently as unreachable as Mary Virginia Eustis.

To start with, he had two assets, the first being Eustis pride. Shrewdly working upon that, Hunter played with skill and finesse.

When he was ready, it was easy enough to meet Miss Eustis on the street of an afternoon. Although her greeting was disconcertingly cold, he fell into step beside her. And presently, in a low and intimate voice, he began to quote certain phrases that rang in her astonished ears with a sort of hateful familiarity.

A glance at her face made him smile. "I wonder," he questioned, "if you have changed, dear puritan? You are engaged to Mayne now, I hear. Very clever chap, Mayne. The moving power behind your father, I understand. And engaged to you! You 're so intense and interesting when you 're in love that one is tempted to envy Mayne. Do you write *him* letters, too?"

Mary Virginia's level eyes regarded him with haughty surprise. The situation was rather unbelievable.

"Miss Eustis—" he paused to bow and smile to some passing girls who plainly envied Mary Virginia, "Miss Eustis, you must come to my office, say to-morrow afternoon. We must have a heart-to-heart talk. I have something you will find it to your interest to discuss with me."

She disdained to reply, to ask him to leave her; her attitude did not even suggest that he should explain himself. Seeming to be perfectly content with this attitude, he sauntered along beside her.

"Do you know," he smiled, "that with you the art of writing genuine love-letters amounts to a gift? I am sure your father—and let 's say Mayne—would be astonished and delighted to read the ones I have. They are unequaled. Human documents, heart-interest, delicate and piquant sex-tang—the very sort of thing the dear public devours. I told you once they meant a great deal to me, remember? They 're going to mean more. Come about four, please." He lifted his hat, bowed, and was gone.

Mary Virginia went to his office at four o'clock the next afternoon, as he had planned she should. She wanted to know exactly what he meant, and she fancied he meant to make her buy back the letters he claimed not to have destroyed. The bare idea of anybody on earth reading those insane vaporings sickened her.

Hunter's manner subtly allowed her to understand that he had known she would come, and this angered her inexpressibly; it gave him an advantage.

"Instead of wasting time in idle persiflage," he said when he had handed her a chair, "let 's get right down to brass tacks. You naturally desire to know why I kept your letters? For one reason, because they are a bit of

real literature. However, I propose to return them now —for a consideration."

He leaned forward, idly drumming on the polished desk, and regarded her with a sort of impersonal speculation. A little smile crept to his lip.

"The whirligig of time does bring in its revenges, does n't it?" he mused aloud. Mary Virginia's lips curled.

"I do not follow you," she said coldly. "I am not even sure you have the letters—that is why I am here. I must see them with my own eyes before I agree to pay for them. That is what you expect me to do, is it not?"

"Oh, I have them all right—that is very easily proven," said he, unruffled. "Now listen carefully, please, while I explain the real reason for your presence here this afternoon. Mr. Inglesby, for reasons of his own, desires to don the senatorial toga; why not? Also, even more vehemently, Mr. Inglesby desires to lead to the altar Miss Mary Virginia Eustis: yourself, dear lady, your charming self: again, why not? Who can blame him for so natural and laudable an ambition?

"As to his ever persuading you to become Mrs. Inglesby, without some—ah—moral suasion, why, you know what his chance would be better than I do. As to his persuading the state to send him to Washington, it would have been a certainty, a sure thing, if our zealous young friend Mayne had n't egged your father into the game. How Mayne managed that, heaven knows, particularly with your father's affairs in the condition they are. Now, Eustis is a fine man. Far too fine to be lost in the shuffle at Washington, where he 'd be a condemned nui-

sance—just as he sometimes is here at home. Do you begin to comprehend?"

"Why, no," said she, blankly. "And I certainly fail to see where my silly letters—"

"Let me make it plainer. You and your silly letters put the game into Mr. Inglesby's hands, swing the balance in his favor. *You* pay *me?* Heavens, no! *We* pay *you*—and a thumping price at that!"

For a long moment they looked at each other.

"My dear Miss Eustis," he put the tips of his fine fingers together, bent forward over them, and favored her with a white-toothed smile, "behold in me Mr. Inglesby's ambassador—the advocate of Cupid. Plainly, I am authorized to offer you Mr. Inglesby's heart, his hand, and—his check-book. Let us suppose you agree to accept—no, don't interrupt me yet, please. And keep your seat, Miss Eustis. You may smile, but I would advise you to consider very seriously what I am about to say to you, and to realize once for all that Mr. Inglesby is in dead earnest and prepared to go to considerable lengths. Well, then, as I was about to say: suppose you agree to accept his proposal? Being above all things a business man, Mr. Inglesby realizes that gilt-edged collateral should be put up for what you have to offer—youth, beauty, charm, health, culture, family name, desirable and influential connections, social position of the highest. In exchange he offers the Inglesby millions, his absolute devotion to yourself, and his hearty support to all your father's plans and interests. Observe the last, please; it is highly important. Besides this, Mayne and Eustis want reform, progress, Demos-with-a-full-dinner-pail, all the wearisome rest of that uplift stuff? Inglesby will

see that they get an undiluted dose of it. More yet: if you have any scruples about Mayne, Inglesby will get behind that young man and boost him until he can crow on the weathervane—when you are Mrs. Inglesby. A chap like Mayne would be valuable, properly expurgated. Come, Miss Eustis, that 's fair enough. If you refuse—well, it 's up to you to make Eustis understand that he must eliminate himself from politics—and look out for himself," he finished ominously.

Mary Virginia rose impetuously.

"I am no longer seventeen, Mr. Hunter. What, do you honestly think you can frighten a grown woman into believing that a handful of silly letters could possibly be worth all that? Well, you can't. And—let me remind you that blackmailing women is n't smiled upon in Carolina. A hint of this and you 'd be ostracized."

"So would you. And why use such an extreme term as blackmailing for what really is a very fair offer?" said he, equably. "The letters are not the only arrows in my quiver, Miss Eustis. But as you are more interested in them than anything else just now, suppose we run over a few, just to remind you of their amazing nature?" He rose leisurely, opened the safe in a corner of the room, took from the steel money-vault a package, and Mary Virginia recognized her own writing. Always keeping them under his own hand, he yet allowed her to lean forward and verify what he chose to read.

Her face burned and tears of mortification stung her eyes. Good heavens, had she been as silly and as sentimental as all that? But as she listened to his smooth remorseless voice, mortification merged into amazement and amazement into consternation. Older and wiser

now, she saw what ignorance and infatuation had really accomplished, and she realized that a fool can unwittingly pull the universe about her ears.

She was appalled. It was as if her waking self were confronted by an incredible something her dreaming self had done. She knew enough of the world now to realize how such letters would be received—with smiles intended to wound, with the raised eyebrow, the shrugged shoulder. She wondered, with a chill of panic, how she could ever hope to make anybody understand what she admitted she herself could n't explain. For heaven's sake, *what* had she been trying to tell this man? She did n't know any more, except that it had n't been what these letters seemed to reveal.

"Well?" said the lazy, pleasant voice, "don't you agree with me that it would have been barbarous to destroy them? Wonderful, are n't they? Who would credit a demure American schoolgirl with their supreme art? A French court lady might have written them, in a day when folks made a fine art of love and were n't afraid nor ashamed."

"I must have been stark mad!" said she, twisting her fingers. "How could I ever have done it? Oh, how?"

"Oh, we all have our moments of genius!" said he, airily.

As he faced her, smiling and urbane, she noted woman-fashion the superfine quality of his linen, the perfection of every detail of his appearance, the grace with which he wore his clothes. His manner was gracious, even courtly. Yet there was about him something so relentless that for the first time she felt a quiver of fear.

"If my father—or Mr. Mayne—knew this, you would

undoubtedly be shot!" said she, and her eyes flashed.

"Unwritten law, chivalry, all the rest of that rot? I am well aware that the Southern trigger-finger is none too steady, where lovely woman is concerned," he admitted, with a faint sneer. "But when one plays for high stakes, Miss Eustis, one runs the risks. Granted I do get shot? That would n't give you the letters: it would simply hand them over to prosecuting attorneys and the public press, and they 'd be damning with blood upon them. No, I don't think there 'll be any fireworks —just a sensible deal, in which everybody benefits and nobody loses."

"The thing is impossible, perfectly impossible."

"I don't see why. Everything has its price and I 'm offering you a pretty stiff one."

"I would rather be burned alive. Marry Mr. Inglesby? *I?* Why, he is impossible, perfectly impossible!"

"He is nothing of the kind. And he is very much in love with you—you amount to a grand passion with Inglesby. Also, he has twenty millions." He added dryly: "You are hard to please."

Mary Virginia waved aside grand passion and twenty millions with a gesture of ineffable disdain.

"Even if I were weak and silly enough to take you seriously, do you imagine my father would ever consent? He would despise me. He would rather see me dead."

"Oh, no, he would n't. Nobody can afford to despise a woman with twenty millions. It is n't in human nature. Particularly when you save Mr. James Eustis himself from coming a breakneck cropper, to say the very least."

For the moment she missed the significance of that last remark.

"I repeat that I would rather be burned alive. I despise the man!" said she, passionately.

"Oh, no, you would n't." His manner was a bit contemptuous. "And you 'd soon get used to him. Women and cats are like that. They may squall and scratch a bit at first, but the saucer of cream reconciles them, and presently they are quite at home and purring, the sensible creatures! You 'll end by liking him very well."

The girl ignored this Job's comforting.

"What shall I say to my father?" she asked directly. "Tell him you kept the foolish letters written you by an ignorant child—and the price is either his or my selling out to Mr. Inglesby?"

"That is your lookout. You can't expect us to let your side whip us, hands down, can you? Mr. Inglesby does not propose to submit tamely to *everything.*" His face hardened, a glacial glint snapped into his eyes. "Inglesby 's no worse than anybody else would be that had to hold down his job. He 's got virtues, plenty of solid good-citizen, church-member, father-of-a-family virtues, little as you seem to realize it. Also, let me repeat—he has twenty millions. To buy up a handful of letters for twenty million dollars looks to me about the biggest price ever paid since the world began. Don't be a fool!"

"I refuse. I refuse absolutely and unconditionally. I shall immediately send for my father—and for Mr. Mayne—"

"I give you credit for better sense," said he, with a razor-edged smile. "Eustis is honorable and Mayne is

in love with you, and when you spring this they 'll swear they believe you: *but will they?* Do men ever believe women, without the leaven of a little doubt? Speaking as a man for men, I would n't put them to the test. No, dear lady, I hardly think you are going to be so silly. Now let us pass on to something of greater moment than the letters. Did you think I had nothing else to urge upon you?"

"What, more?" said she, derisively. "I don't think I understand."

"I am sure you don't. Permit me, then, to enlighten you." He paused a moment, as if to reflect. Then, impressively:

"Hitherto, Miss Eustis, you have had the very button on Fortune's cap," he told her. "Suppose, however, that fickle goddess chose to whisk herself off bodily, and left you—*you,* mind you! to face the ugly realities of poverty, and poverty under a cloud?" And while she stared at him blankly, he asked: "What do you know of your father's affairs?"

As a matter of fact she knew very little. But something in the deadly pleasantness of his voice, something in his eyes, startled her.

"What do you mean, Mr. Hunter?"

"Ah, now we get down to bedrock: your father's affairs," he said evenly. "Your father, Miss Eustis, is a very remarkable man, a man with one idea. In other words, a fanatic. Only a fanatic could accomplish what Eustis has accomplished. His one idea is the very sound old idea that people should remain on the land. He starts in to show his people how to do it successfully. Once started, the work grows like Jonah's gourd. He

becomes a sort of rural white hope. So far, so good. But reclamation work, experimenting, blooded stock, up-to-the-minute machinery, labor-saving devices, chemicals, high-priced experts, labor itself, all that calls for money, plenty of money. Your father's work grew to its monumental proportions because he 'd gotten other men interested in it—all sorts and conditions of men, but chiefly—and here 's at once his strength and weakness—farmers, planters, small-town merchants and bankers. They backed him with everything they had—and they have n't lost—yet.

"However, there are such things as bad seasons, labor troubles, boll-weevil, canker, floods, war. He lost shiploads of cotton. He lost heavily on rice. Remember those last floods? In some of his places they wiped the work of years clean off the map. He had to begin all over, and he had to do it on borrowed money; which in lean and losing years is expensive. Floods may come and crops may go, but interest on borrowed money goes on forever. He mortgaged all he could mortgage, risked everything he could risk, took every chance—and now everything is at stake with him.

"Do you realize what it would mean if Eustis went under? A smash to shake the state! Consider, too, the effect of failure upon the man himself! He can't fail, though—*if Mr. Inglesby chooses to lend a hand.* Now do you begin to comprehend?"

In spite of her distrust, he impressed her profoundly. He did not over-estimate her father's passionate belief in himself and the value of his work. If anything, Hunter had slurred the immense influence Eustis exerted, and the calamitous effect his failure would have upon

the plain people who looked up to him with such unlimited trust. They would not only lose their money; they would lose something no money could pay for—their faith.

"Oh, but that just simply could n't happen!" said Mary Virginia, and her chin went up.

"It could very easily happen. It may happen shortly," he contradicted politely. "Heavens, girl, don't you know that the Eustis house is mortgaged to the roof, that Rosemount Plantation is mortgaged from the front fences to the back ditches? No, I suppose he would n't want his women-folks to know. He thinks he can tide it over. They always believe they can tide it over, those one-idea chaps. And he could, too, for he 's a born winner, is Eustis. Give him time and a good season and he 'd be up again, stronger than ever." While he spoke he was taking from a drawer a handful of papers, which he spread out on the desk. She could see upon all of them a bold clear "*James Eustis.*"

"One place mortgaged to prop up another, and that in turn mortgaged to save a third. Like links in a chain. Any chain is only as strong as its weakest link, remember. And we 've got the links. Look at these, please." He laid before her two or three slips of paper. Mary Virginia's eyes asked for enlightenment.

"These," explained Hunter, "are promissory notes. You will see that some of them are about due—and the amounts are considerable."

"Oh! And *he* had to do that?"

"Of course. What else could he do? We kept a very close watch since we got the first inkling that things were not breaking right for him. Mr. Inglesby's own

interests are pretty extensive—and we set them to work. It was n't hard to manage, after things began to shape: a word here, a hint there, an order somewhere else; and once or twice, of course, a bit of pressure was brought to bear, in obdurate instances. But the man with money is always the man with the whip hand. Eustis got the help he had to have—and presently we got these. All perfectly legitimate, all in the course of the day 's work.

"Now, promissory notes are dangerous instruments should a holder desire to use them dangerously. Mr. Inglesby could give Eustis an extension of time, or he could demand full payment and immediately foreclose. You see, it 's entirely optional with Mr. Inglesby." And he leaned back in his chair, perfectly self-possessed, entirely at his ease, and waited for her to speak.

"You could do that—anybody could do that—to my father?" she was only half-convinced.

"I assure you we can send him under—with a lot of other men's money tied around his neck to keep him down."

"But even you would hesitate to do a thing like that!"

"All is fair," said Hunter, "in love and war."

"*Fair?*"

"Legitimate, then."

"But if he is in Mr. Inglesby's way and in his power at the same time, why not remove him in the ordinary course of business? Why drag in me and my letters?"

"Why? Because it 's the letters that enable us to reach *you*. My dear girl, Mr. Inglesby does n't really give a hang whether Eustis sinks or swims. He 'd as lief back him as not, for in the long run it 's good business to back a winner. But it 's *you* he 's playing for,

and on that count all is fish that comes to his net. *Now* do you begin to see?"

Mary Virginia began to see. She looked at the unruffled man before her a bit wonderingly.

"And what do *you* get out of this?" she asked, unexpectedly. "Mr. Inglesby is to get me, I am to get his money and a package of letters, my father is to get time to save himself; well then, what do *you* get? The pleasure of doing something wrong? Revenge?"

But Hunter looked at her with cold astonishment. "You surprise me," he said. "You talk as if you 'd been going to see too many of those insufferable screen-plays that make the proletariat sniffle and the intelligent swear. I am merely a business man, Miss Eustis, and attending to this particular affair for my employer is all in the course of the day's work. I—er—am not in a position to refuse to obey orders or to be captious, particularly since Mr. Inglesby has agreed to double my present salary. That in itself is no light inducement—but I get more. I get Mr. Inglesby's personal backing, which means an assured future to me; as it will mean to you and your father, if you have got the sense you were born with. This is business. Kindly omit melodrama—crude, and not at all your style, really," he finished, critically.

"This is nothing short of villainy. And not at all too crude for *your* style," said Mary Virginia.

He laughed good-humoredly. "Bad temper is vastly becoming to you," he told her. "It gives you a magnificent color."

And at that Mary Virginia looked at him with eyes in which the shadow of fear was deepening. Hard as nails,

cold as ice, to him she was merely a means to an end. He did not even hate her. The guillotine does not hate those whom it decapitates, either; none the less it takes off their heads once they get in the way of the descending knife.

"I suggest," said Hunter, rising, "that you go home now and think the matter over carefully. Weigh what you and your father stand to gain against what you stand to lose. I do not press you for an immediate decision. You shall have a reasonable time for consideration." It was a threat and a command, thinly veiled.

All that night, unable to sleep, she did think the matter over carefully; she turned and twisted it about and about and saw it now from this angle and now from that; and the more she studied it in all its bearings the worse it grew. There was no escape from it.

Suppose, although she knew she could never, never hope to satisfactorily explain them, she nevertheless told her father about those letters and the part they were to be made play, now that his own affairs had reached a crisis? She could fancy herself telling him that he must shield himself behind her skirts if he would save himself from ruin. That . . . to James Eustis!

Suppose that the Carolina trigger-finger slipped, as Hunter had nonchalantly admitted might happen: what then? But it is the woman in the case who always suffers the most and the longest; it is the woman, always, who pays the greater price. Her fears magnified the imagined evil, her pride was crucified.

What tortured her most was that they were actually making her party to a wreck that could easily be averted. Hunter had admitted that Eustis could weather the storm,

if he were given time. Oh, to gain time for him, then! And she lay there, staring into the dark with wet eyes. How could she help him, she who was also snared?

And in desperation she hit upon a forlorn hope. She dared not speak out openly to anybody, she dared not flatly refuse Inglesby's pretensions, for that would be to invite the avalanche. What she proposed to herself was to hold him off as long as she could. She would not be definite until the last possible minute. Always there was the chance that by some miracle of mercy Eustis might be able to meet those notes when they fell due. Let him do that, and she would then tell him everything. But not now. He was bearing too much, without that added burden.

It cost her a supreme effort to face the situation as it affected herself and Laurence. Life without Laurence! The bare thought of it tested her heart and showed her how inalienably it belonged to him. But under all his lovingness and his boyishness, Laurence had a sternness, a ruggedness as adamantine as one of Cromwell's Ironsides. With him to know would be to act. Well—he must n't know. It terrified her to think of just what might happen, if Laurence knew.

Under the circumstances there seemed but one course open to her—to give up Laurence, and that without explanations. For his own sake she had to keep silent—just as Hunter had known she would. What Laurence must think of her, even the loss of his affection and respect, would be part of the price paid for having been a fool.

In the most unobtrusive manner they kept in touch with her. Hunter had so adroitly wirepulled, and so

deftly softened and toned down Inglesby's crudities, that Mrs. Eustis had become the latter's open champion. Condescending and patronizing, she liked the importance of lending a very rich man her social countenance. She insisted that he was misunderstood. Men of great fortunes are always misunderstood. Nobody considers it a virtue to be charitable to the rich—they save all their charity for the poor, who as often as not are undeserving, and are generally insanitary as well. Mrs. Eustis thanked her heavenly Father she was a woman of larger vision, and never thought ill of a man just because he happened to be a millionaire. Millionaires have got souls, she hoped? And hearts? Mrs. Eustis said she knew Mr. Inglesby's noble heart, my dear, whether others did or not.

Compelled to apparently jilt Laurence, Mary Virginia sank deeper and deeper into the slough of despond. A terror of Inglesby's power, as of something supernatural, was growing upon her, a terror almost childish in its intensity. He had begun to occupy the niche vacated by the Boogerman her Dah had threatened her with in her nursery. She could barely conceal this terror, save that an instinct warned her that to let him know she feared him would be fatal. And she felt for him a physical repulsion strong enough to be nauseating.

The fact that she disdained and perhaps even disliked him and made no effort to conceal her feelings, did not in the least ruffle his bland complacency nor affront his pride. He knew that not even an Inglesby could hope to find a Mary Virginia more than once in a lifetime, and the haughtier she was the more she pleased him;

it added to his innate sense of power, and this in itself endeared her to him inexpressibly.

But as the girl still held out stubbornly, trying to evade the final word that would force a climax disastrous any way she viewed it, Inglesby's patience was exhausted. He was determined to make her come to terms by the word of her own mouth, and he had no doubt that her final word must be Yes; perhaps a Yes reluctant enough, but nevertheless one to which he meant to hold her.

To make that final demand more impressive, Hunter was not entrusted with the interview. Hunter may have been doubtful as to the wisdom of this, but Inglesby could no longer forego the delight of dealing with Mary Virginia personally. On the Saturday night, then, Mrs. Eustis being absent, Mr. Inglesby, manicured, massaged, immaculate, shaven and shorn, called in person; and not daring to refuse, Mary Virginia received him, wondering if for her the end of the world had not come.

He made a mistake, for Mary Virginia had her back against the wall, literally waiting for the Eustis roof to fall. But he could not forego the pleasure of witnessing her pride lower its crest to him. He did not relish a go-between, even such a successful one as his secretary. He had made up his mind that she should have until to-morrow night, Sunday, to come to a decision—just that long, and not another hour. He was not getting younger; he wanted to marry, to found a great establishment as whose mistress Mary Virginia should shine. And she was making him lose time.

What Inglesby succeeded in doing was to bring her

terror to a head, and to fill her with a sick loathing of him. Under the smooth protestations, the promises, the threats veiled with hateful and oily smiles, the man himself was revealed: crude, brutal, dominant, ruthless, a male animal bull-necked and arrogant, with small eyes, wide nostrils, cruel moist lips, sensual fat white hands she hated. And he was so sure of her! Mary Virginia found herself smarting under that horrible sureness.

Perfectly at his ease, inclined to be familiar and jocose, he looked insolently about the lovely old room that had never before held such a suitor for a daughter of that house. Watching her with the complacent eyes of an accepted lover, assuming odious airs of proprietorship such as made one wish to throttle him, he was in no hurry to go. It seemed to her that black and withering years rolled over her head before he could bring himself to rise to take his departure. Death could hardly be colder to a mortal than she had been to this man all the evening, and yet it had not disconcerted him in the least!

He stood for a moment regarding her with the eyes of possession. "And to think that to-morrow night I shall have the right to openly claim you as my promised wife!" he exulted. "You can't realize what it means to a man to be able to say to the world that the most beautiful woman in it is his!"

Directly in front of her hung the portrait of the founder of the house in Carolina, the cavalier who had fled to the new world when Charles Stuart's head fell in the old one. It was a fine and proud face, the eyes frank and brave, the mouth firm and sweet. The girl looked from it to George Inglesby's, and found herself unable to speak. But as she stood before him, tall and

proud and pale, the loveliness, the appealing charm of her, went like a strong wine to the man's head. With a quick and fierce movement he seized her hand and covered it with hot and hateful kisses.

At the touch of his lips cold horror seized her. She dragged her hand free and waved him back with a splendid indignation. But Inglesby was out of hand; he had taken the bit between his teeth, and now he bolted.

"Do you think I 'm made of stone?" he bellowed, and the mask slipped altogether. There was no hypocrisy about Inglesby now; this was genuine. "Well, I 'm not! I 'm a man, a flesh-and-blood man, and I 'm crazy for you—and you 're *mine!* You 're *mine,* and you might just as well face the music and get acquainted with me, first as last. Understand?

"I 'm not such a bad sort—what 's the matter with me, anyhow? Why ain't I good enough for you or any other woman? Suppose I 'm not a young whippersnapper with his head full of nonsense and his pockets full of nothing, can the best popinjay of them all do for you what *I* can? Can any of 'em offer you what *I* can offer? Let him try to: I 'll raise his bid!

"Here—don't you stand there staring at me as if I 'd tried to slit your throat just because I 've kissed your hand. Suppose I did? Why should n't I kiss your hand if I want to? It 's my hand, when all 's said and done, and I 'll kiss it again if I feel like it. No, no, beauty, I won't, not if it 's going to make you look at me like that! Why, queen, I would n't frighten you for worlds! I love you too much to want to do anything but please you. I 'd do anything, everything, just to please you, to make you like me! You 'll believe that,

won't you?" And he held out his hands with a supplicating and impassioned gesture.

"Why can't we be friends? Try to be friends with me, Mary Virginia! You would, if you only knew how much I love you. Why, I 've loved you ever since that first day I saw you, after you 'd come back home. I was going into the bank, and I turned, and there you were! You had on a gray dress, and you wore violets, a big bunch of them. I can smell them yet. God! It was all up with me! I was crazy about you from the start, and it 's been getting worse and worse . . . worse and worse!

"You don't know all I mean to do for you, beauty! I 'm going to give you this little old world to play with. Nothing 's too good for *you*. Look at me! I 'm not an old man yet—I 've only just *begun* to make money for you. Now be a little kind to me. You 've got to marry me, you know. Look here: you kiss me good-night, just once, of your own free will, and I swear you shall have anything under the sky you ask me for. Do you want a string of pearls that will make yours look like a child's playpretty? I 'll hang a million dollars around that white throat of yours!"

But there came into the girl's eyes that which gave him pause. They stood staring at each other; and slowly the wine-dark flush faded from his face and left him livid. Little dents came about his nose, and his lips puckered as if the devil had pinched them together.

"No?" said he thickly, and his jaw hardened, and his eyes narrowed under his square forehead. "No? You won't, eh? Too fine and proud? My lady, you 'll learn to kiss me when I tell you to, and glad enough of the

chance, before you and I finish with each other! Why, you—I—Oh, good God! Why do you rouse the devil in me, when I only want to be friends with you?"

But she, with a ghastly face, turned swiftly and with her head held high walked out of the room, passed through the wide hall, and ascended the stairs, without even bidding him goodnight. Let him take his dismissal as he would—she could stand no more!

Once in her own room, Mary Virginia dismissed Nancy for the night. She had to be alone, and the colored woman was an irrepressible magpie. Furiously she scrubbed her hands, as if to remove the taint of his touch. That he had dared! Her teeth chattered. She could barely save herself from screaming aloud. She bathed her face, dashed some toilet water over herself, and fell into a chair, limp and unnerved.

One day!

She was facing the end and she knew it. Because she had to say No. She had never for one minute admitted to herself the possibility of her own surrender. She could give up Laurence, since she had to; but she could not accept Inglesby. Anything rather than that! At the most, all she had hoped was to evade that final No until the last moment, in order to give Eustis what poor respite she could. Only her great love for him had enabled her to do that much. And it had not helped. When she thought of the wreck that must come, she beat her hands together, softly, in sheer misery. It was like standing by and watching some splendid ship being pounded to pieces on the rocks.

Only her innate bravery and her real and deep religious instinct saved her from altogether sinking into

inertia and despair. She *had* to arouse herself. Other women had faced situations equally as impossible and unbearable as hers, and the best of them had not allowed themselves to be whipped into tame and abject submission. Even at the worst they had snatched the great chance to live their own lives in their own way. As for her, surely there must be some way out of this snarl, some immediate way that led to honorable freedom, even without hope. But how and where was she to find any way open to her, between now and to-morrow night?

On her dressing table, with a handful of trinkets upon it, lay the tray that the Butterfly Man had sent her when she was graduated. Chin in hands, Mary Virginia stared absently enough at the brightly colored butterflies she had been told to remember were messengers bearing on their wings the love of the Parish House people. Why—why—of course! The Parish House people! They had blamed her, because they had n't understood. But if she were to ask the Parish House people for any help within their power, she could be sure of receiving it without stint.

If she could get to the Parish House without anybody knowing where she was, Inglesby and Hunter would be balked of that interview to-morrow night. The worst was going to happen anyhow, but if she could n't save herself from anything else, at least she could save herself from facing them alone. To be able to do that, she would go now, in the middle of the night, and tell the Padre everything. Unnerved as she was, she could n't face the hours between now and to-morrow morning here, by herself. She had to get to the Parish House.

It was then after eleven. Nancy having been dis-

missed for the night, she had no fear of being interrupted. She made her few preparations, switched off the light, and sat down to wait until she could be sure that all the servants were abed, and the streets deserted. She felt as if she were a forlorn castaway upon a pinpoint of land, with immeasurable dark depths upon either side.

The midnight express screeched and was gone. She switched on the light for a last look about her pretty, pleasant room. There was a snapshot of the Parish House people upon her mantel, and she nodded to it, gravely, before she once more plunged the room into darkness.

Noiselessly she slipped downstairs and let herself out. The midnight air was bitingly cold, but she did not feel it. With one handsatchel holding all she thought she could honestly lay claim to, Mary Virginia turned her back upon the home that had sheltered her all her life, but that would n't be able to shelter its own people much longer, because Inglesby was going to take it away from them. It made her wince to think of him as master under that roof. The old house deserved a happier fate.

At best the Parish House could be only a momentary stopping-place. What lay beyond she did n't know. What her fate held further of evil she could n't guess. But at least, she thought, it would be in her own hands. It was n't. Unexpectedly and mercifully was it put into the abler and stronger hands of the Butterfly Man.

Now, that night Flint had found himself unable to work. He was unaccountably depressed. He could n't read; even the Bible, opened at his favorite John, had n't any comfort for him. He shoved the book aside, snatched

hat and overcoat, and fled to his refuge the healing out-of-doors.

He trudged the country roads for awhile, then turned toward town, intending to pass by the Eustis house. It was n't the first time he had passed the Eustis house at night of late, and just to see it asleep in the midst of its gardens steadied him and made him smile at the vague fears he entertained.

He was almost up to the gate when a girl emerged from it, and he stiffened in his tracks, for it was Mary Virginia. A second later, and they stood face to face.

"Don't be alarmed, it is I, Flint," he said in his quiet voice. And then he asked directly: "Why are you out alone at this hour? Where are you going?"

"To—to the Parish House," she stammered. She was greatly startled by his sudden appearance.

"Exactly," said the Butterfly Man, with meaning, and relieved her of her satchel. He asked no questions, offered no comments; but as quickly as he could he got her to his own rooms, put Kerry on guard, and ran for help.

CHAPTER XVIII

ST. STANISLAUS CROOKS HIS ELBOW

MARY VIRGINIA'S voice trailed into silence and she sank back into her chair, staring somberly at the fire. Her face marked with tears, the long braids of her hair over her shoulders, she looked so like a sad and chidden child that the piteousness of her would have moved and melted harder hearts than ours.

The Butterfly Man had listened without an interruption. He sat leaning slightly forward, knees crossed, the left arm folded to support the elbow of the right, and his chin in his cupped right hand. His eyes had the piercing clear directness of an eagle's; they burned with an unwavering pale flame. Shrewder far than I, he saw the great advantage of knowing the worst, of at last thoroughly understanding Hunter and Inglesby and the motives which moved them. He had, too, a certain tolerance. These two had merely acted according to their lights; he had not expected any more or less, therefore he was not surprised now into an undue condemnation.

But the fighting instinct rose rampant in me. My hands are De Rancé hands, the hands of soldiers as well as of priests, and they itched for a weapon, preferably a sword. Horrified and astonished, suffocating with

anger, I had no word at command to comfort this victim of abominable cunning. Indeed, what could I say; what could I do? I looked helplessly at the Butterfly Man, and the stronger man looked back at me, gravely and impassively.

"But what is to be done?" I groaned.

He seemed to know, for he said at once:

"Call Madame. Tell her to bring some extra wraps. I am going to take Mary Virginia home, and Madame will go with us."

"But why should n't she stay here?"

"Because she 'd better be at home to-morrow morning, parson. We 're not supposed to know anything of her affairs, and I 'd rather she did n't appear at the Parish House. Also, she needs sleep right now more than she needs anything else, and one sleeps better in one's own bed. Madame will see that she goes to hers and stays there."

I was perfectly willing to commit the affair into John Flint's hands. But Mary Virginia demurred.

"No. I want to stay here! I don't want to go home, Padre."

Flint shook his head. "I 'm sorry," he said mildly, "but I 'm going to take you home." He looked so inexorable that Mary Virginia shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, all right, Mr. Flint, I 'll go," said she. "What difference does it make? I 'll even go to bed—as I 'm told." And she added in a tone of indescribable bitterness: "I have read that men lie down and sleep peacefully the night before they are hanged. Well, I suppose they could: they had n't anything but death to face on the morrow, but I—" and she caught her breath.

"Why not take it for granted to-night that you 'll be looked after to-morrow?" suggested Flint. "Mary Virginia, nothing 's ever so bad as it 's going to be."

"Oh, yes, I 'll be looked after to-morrow!" said she, bitingly. "Mr. Inglesby will see to that!" She covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, I don't know!" The Butterfly Man shut his mouth on the words like a knife. "Inglesby may think he 's going to, but somehow *I* think he won't."

"Ah!" said she scornfully. "Perhaps *you 'll* be able to stop him?"

"Perhaps," he agreed. "If I don't, somebody or something else will. It 's very unlucky to be too lucky too long. You see, everybody 's got to get what 's coming to them, and it generally comes hardest when they 've tied themselves up to the notion they 're It. Somehow I fancy Mr. Inglesby 's due to come considerable of a cropper around about now."

"Between now and to-morrow night?" she wondered, with sad contempt.

"Why not? Anything can happen between a night and a night." He looked at her with shrewd appreciation: "You have taken yourself so seriously," said he, "that you 've pretty nearly muddled yourself into being tragic. Those fellows knew who they were dealing with when they tackled *you*. They could bet the limit you 'd never tell. So long as you did n't tell, so long as they had nobody but you to deal with, they had you where they wanted you. But now maybe things might happen that have n't been printed in the program."

"What things?" she mocked somberly.

"I don't know, yet," he admitted. "But I do know

there is always a way out of everything except the grave. The thing is to find the right way. That 's up to the Padre and me. Parson, would you mind going after Madame now, please? The sooner we go the better."

Have I not said my mother is the most wonderful of women? I waked her in the small hours with the startling information that Mary Virginia was downstairs in John Flint's workroom, and that she herself must dress and accompany her home. And my mother, though she looked her stark bewilderment, plagued me with no questions.

"She is in great trouble, and she needs you. Hurry."

Madame slid out of her bed and reached for her neatly folded garments.

"Wait in the hall, Armand; I will be with you in ten minutes." And she was, wrapped and hatted.

Once in the workroom, she cast a deep and searching woman-glance at the pale girl in the chair. Her face was so sweet with motherliness and love and pity, and that profound comprehension the best women show to each other, that I felt my throat contract. Gathered into Madame's embrace, Mary Virginia clung to her old friend dumbly. Madame had but one question:

"My child, have you told John Flint and my son what this trouble of yours is?"

"Yes; I had to, I had to!"

"Thank the good God for that!" said my mother piously. "Now we will go home, dearest, and you can sleep in peace—you have nothing more to worry about!"

The clasp of the comforting arms, the sweet serenity of the mild eyes, and above all the little lady's perfect confidence, aroused Mary Virginia out of her torpor.

She felt that she no longer stood alone at the mercy of the merciless. Bundled in the wraps my mother had provided, she paused at the door.

"I think you will forgive me any trouble I may cause you, because I am sure all of you love me. And whatever comes, I will be brave enough to face and to bear it. Padre, dear Padre, you understand, don't you?"

"My child, my darling child, I understand."

"I 'll be back in half an hour, parson," the Butterfly Man remarked meaningly. Then the three melted into the night.

Left alone, I was far from sharing Madame's simple faith in our ability to untangle this miserable snarl. I knew now the temper of the men we had to deal with. I also understood that in cases like this the Southern trigger-finger is none too steady. Seen from a certain point of view, if ever men deserved an unconditional and thorough killing, these two did. Yet this homicidal specter turned me cold, for Mary Virginia's sake.

For Eustis himself I could see nothing but ruin ahead, but I wished passionately to help the dear girl who had come to me in her stress. But what was one to do? How should one act?

I sat there dismally enough, my chin sunk upon my breast; for as a plotter, a planner, a conspirator, I am a particularly hopeless failure. I have no sense of intrigue, and the bare idea of plotting reduces me to stupefaction.

Perhaps because I am a priest by instinct, I always discover in myself the instant need of prayer when confronted by the unusual and the difficult. I have prayed over seemingly hopeless problems in my time and I think

I have been led to a clear solution of many of them. Major Cartwright insists that this is merely because I bring desire and will to bear upon a given point and so release an irresistible natural force. He says prayer is as much a science as, say, mathematics—such and such its units, and such and such its fixed results. Well, maybe so. All I know is that when I beseech aid I think I receive it.

So I ran over to the church and let myself in. I felt that at least for a few minutes I must kneel before the altar and implore help for her who was like my own child to me.

The empty church was quite black save for the sanctuary lamp and the little red votive lights burning before the statues of the saints and of our Lady. All these many little lights only cast the veriest ghosts of brightness upon the darkness, but the white altar was revealed by the larger glow of the sanctuary lamp. There it shone with a mild and pure luster, unfailing, calm, steady, burning through the night, the sign and symbol of that light of Love which cannot fail, but burns and burns and burns forever and forever before an altar that is the infinite universe itself.

My little-faith, my ready-to-halt faith, raised its head above the encompassing waters; the wild turmoil and torment died away: . . . after the earthquake and the fire and the whirlwind, the still small voice. . . .

Then I, to whom life at best can only be working and waiting, was for a space able to pray for her to whom life should be *"as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a clear morning without clouds; and as the tender grass by clear shining after rain."* I remembered

her as she had first come to me, a little loving child to fill my empty heart, the poor clay heart that cannot even hold fast to the love of God but by these frail all-powerful ties of simple human affection. And when I thought of her now, so young and so sore-beset, a bird caught in the snare of the fowler, I beat my breast for pity and for grief. Oh, how should I help her, how?

I turned my head, and there stood St. Stanislaus upon his pedestal, the memorial lights flickering upon his long robe, his smooth boy's face, his sheaf of lilies. I regarded him rather absently. Something stirred in my consciousness; something I always had to remember in connection with St. Stanislaus. . . .

Across my mind as across a screen flashed a series of pictures—a mangled tramp carried into the Parish House, my mother watching with a concerned and shocked face, and the hall mud-stained by the trampling feet of the clumsy bearers; the shaggy Poles, caps off, turning over to me as to high authority the heavy oilskin package they had found; I opening that package later and standing amazed and startled before its contents; and that same package, hidden under my cassock, carried over to the church and placed for security and secrecy in the keeping of the little saint. Well, that had been quite right; there had been nothing else to do; one had to be secret and careful when one had in one's keeping the tools of that notorious burglar, Slippy McGee.

Small wonder that I did not connect those pictures with the fate of Mary Virginia Eustis! No, I did not immediately grasp their tremendous bearing upon the petitions I was repeating. And all the while, with a dull insistence, an enraging persistence, they flickered

before the eyes of my memory—the Poles, the screaming cursing tramp; Westmoreland pondering aloud as to why he had been permitted to save so apparently worthless a life; and the little saint hiding from the eyes of men all traces of lost Slippy McGee. Nor, more curiously yet, did I connect them with the Butterfly Man. The Butterfly Man was somebody else altogether, another and a different person, a man of whom even one's secretest thoughts were admiring and respectful. He was so far removed from the very shadow of such things as these, that it did one's conscience a sort of violence to think of him in connection with them. I tried to dismiss the memories from my mind. I wished to concentrate wholly upon the problem of Mary Virginia.

And then that mysterious, hidden self-under-self that lives in us far, far beneath thought and instinct and conscience and heredity and even consciousness itself, rose to the surface with a message:

Slippy McGee had been the greatest cracksman in all America. . . . "Honest to God, skypilot, I can open any box made, easy as easy!" . . . *And even as his tools were hidden in St. Stanislaus, Slippy McGee himself was hidden in John Flint.*

Recoiling, I clung to the altar railing. What dreadful thing was I contemplating, what fearful temptation was assailing me, here under the light of the sanctuary lamp? I looked reproachfully at St. Stanislaus, as if that seraphic youth had betrayed my confidence. I suspected him of being too anxious to rid himself of the ambiguous trust imposed upon him without so much as a by-your-leave. Perhaps he was secretly irked at the use to which his painted semblance had been put, and seized this first

opportunity to extricate himself from a position in which the boldest saint of them all might well hesitate to find himself.

I began to consider John Flint as he was, the work he had accomplished, the splendid structure of that life slowly and laboriously made over and lived so cleanly in the light of day. Not only had that old evil personality been sloughed off like a larval skin; he had come forth from it another creature, a being lovable, wise, tender, full of charm. Even the hint of melancholy that was becoming more and more a part of him endeared him to others, for the broader and brighter the light into which he was steadily mounting, the more marked and touching was this softening shadow.

And I who had been the *accoucheur* of his genius, I who had watched and prayed and ministered beside the cradle of his growth, was I of all men to threaten his overthrow? Alas, what madness was upon me that I was evoking before the very altar the grim ghost of Slippy McGee?

There passed before me in procession the face of Laurence with all its boyish bloom stripped from it and the glory of its youth vanished; and the bowed and humbled head of James Eustis, one of the large and noble souls of this world; and the innocent beauty of Mary Virginia, wistfully appealing; followed them the beautiful ruthless face of Hunter, dazzlingly blonde, gold-haired as Baldur; and the piglike eyes and heavy jowl of Inglesby, brutally dominant; and then the dear whimsical visage of the Butterfly Man himself. They passed; and I fell to praying, with a sort of still desperation, for all of us.

And all the while the steady and rosy light of the sanctuary lamp fell upon me, and the little lights flickered before the silent saints. I took myself in hand, forced myself into self-control. I did not minimize one risk nor slur one danger. I knew exactly what was at stake. And having done this, I decided upon my course:

"If he has thought of this himself, then I will help. But if he has not, I will not suggest it, no, no matter what happens."

I told myself I would say ten more Hailmarys, and I said them, with an Ourfather at the end. And without further praying I got to my feet. The church seemed to be full of breathless whisperings, as if it watched and listened while I moved over to Stanislaus and tipped him backward. He is a rather heavy and sizable boy for all his saintly slimness. Up in the hollow inside, in the crook of his arm, lay the oilskin package he had kept these long years through, waiting for to-night.

"If ever you prayed for mortals in peril, pray, for the love of God, for all of us this night!" I told him. And with the package in a fold of my cassock I went back across the dark garden and let myself into the Butterfly Man's rooms, and was hardly inside the door when he himself returned.

"Did n't meet a soul. And they got in without waking anybody in the house," said he complacently, rubbing his hands before the fire. "I waited until they showed a light upstairs. She 's all right, now Madame 's with her."

"Have you—have you thought of anything—any way, John?" I quavered, and wondered if he heard my heart dunting against my ribs.

"Why, I 've thought that she 's got until to-morrow night to come to terms," said he, and turned to face me. "And she can't accept them. Nobody could—that is, not a girl like her. As for Inglesby, he might push Eustis under, but he would n't have been so cocksure of *her* if it was n't for those letters. She 's been afraid of what might happen if Eustis or Laurence found out about them—somebody ran the risk of being put to bed with a shovel. There 's where they had her. A bit unbearable to think of, is n't it?" He spoke so mildly that I looked up with astonishment and some disappointment.

"Why," said I, ruefully, "if that 's as far as you 've gone, we are still at the starting point."

"No need to go farther and fare worse, parson," said he, equably. "I saw that the first minute I could see anything but red. Yet do you know, when she was telling us about it, I thought like a fool of everything but the right thing, from sandbagging and shanghaing Inglesby, down to holding up Hunter with an automatic?

"When I got my reason on straight, I went back to the starting point—the letters, parson, the letter in the safe in Hunter's office. Given the letters she 'd be free —the one thing Inglesby does n't want to happen. We 've got to have those letters."

My mouth was parched as with fever and I saw him through a blur.

"I don't know," he went on, "if you agree with me, parson, but to my mind the best way to fight the devil is with fire. What did you do with those tools?"

"*Tools?*" in a dry whisper. "*Tools,* John?"

"Tools. Kit. Layout. You had them. Could you

put your hand on them in a hurry to-night? Don't stare so, man! And for the Lord's love don't you tell me you destroyed them! What did you do with my tools?"

The four winds roared in my ears, and one lifted the hair on my scalp, as if the Rider on the Pale Horse had passed by. By way of reply I placed a heavy package on the table before him, slumped into my chair, and covered my face with my hands. Oh, Stanislaus, little saint, what had we done between us to-night to the Butterfly Man?

When I looked up again he had risen. With his hands gripping the edge of the table until the knuckles showed white, and his neck stretched out, he was staring with all his eyes. A low whistle escaped him. Wonder, incredulity, a sort of ironic amusement, and a growing, iron-jawed determination, expressed themselves in his changing countenance. Once or twice he wet his lips and swallowed. Then he sat down again, deliberately, and fixed upon me a long and somewhat disconcerting stare, as if he were rearranging and tabulating his estimate of Father Armand Jean De Rancé. He took his head in his hands, and with slitted eyes considered the immediate course of action to which the possession of that package committed him. One surmised that he was weighing and providing for every possible contingency.

Tentatively he spread out his fine hands, palms uppermost, and flexed them; then, turning them, he laid them flat upon the table and again spread out his fingers. They were notable hands—shapely, supple, strong as steel, the thin-skinned fingertips as delicate and sensitive of touch as the antennæ he was used to handling. They

were even more capable than of old, because of the exquisite work they had been trained to accomplish, work to which only the most skilled lapidary's is comparable. Apparently satisfied, he drew the bundle toward him. Before he opened it he lifted those cool, blue, and ironic eyes to mine; and I am sure I was by far the paler and more shaken of the two.

"They were in the crook of St. Stanislaus' arm." I tried to keep my voice steady. "I was praying—when you were gone." Somehow, I did not find it easy to explain to him. "And . . . I remembered. . . . And I brought them with me . . . so in case you also . . . remembered—" I could go no further. I broke into a sort of groaning cry: "Oh, John, John! My son, my son!"

"Steady!" said he. "Of course you remembered, parson. It 's the only way. Did n't I tell her there 's always a way out? Well, here it is!" His funny, twisted smile came to his lips; it twisted the heart in my breast. No thought of himself, of what this thing might mean to him, seemed to cross his mind.

"I prayed," said I, almost sobbing, "I prayed. And, John, there stood St. Stanislaus—" I stopped again, choking.

He nodded, understandingly. He was methodically spreading out the not unbeautiful instruments. And as he picked them up one by one, handling them with his strong and expert fingers and testing each with a hawk-eyed scrutiny, a most curious and subtle change stole over the Butterfly Man.

I felt as if I were witnessing the evocation of something superhuman. Horrified and fascinated, I saw

what might be called the apotheosis of Slippy McGee, so far above him was it, come back and subtly and awfully blend with my scientist. It was as if two strong and powerful individualities had deliberately joined forces to forge a more vital being than either, since the training, knowledge, skill and intellect of both would be his to command. If such a man as *this* ever stepped over the deadline he would not be merely "the slickest cracksman in America"; he would be one of the master criminals of the earth. I fancy he must have felt this intoxicating new access of power, for there emanated from him something of a fierce and exalted delight. A potentiality, as yet neither good nor evil, he suggested a spiritual and physical dynamo.

He gave a tigerish purr of pleasure over the tools, handling them with the fingers of the artist and admiring them with the eyes of the connoisseur. "The best I could get. All made to order. Tested blue steel. I never kicked at the price, and you would n't believe me if I told you what this layout cost in cold cash. But they paid. Good stuff always pays in the long run. It was lucky I winded the cops on that last job, or I 'd have had to leave them. As it was, I just had time to grab them up before I hit the trail for the skyline. They don't need anything but a little rubbing—a saint's elbow must be a snug berth. I wish I had some juice, though."

"Juice?"

"Nitroglycerine," very gently, as to a child. "It does not make very much noise and it saves time when you 're in a hurry—as you generally are, in this business," he smiled at me quizzically. "Not that one can't

get along without it." The swift fingers paused for a fraction of a second to give a steel drill an affectionate pat. "I used to know one of the best ever, who never used anything but a particular drill, a pet bit, and his ear. Somebody snitched though, so the last I heard of him he was doing a twenty-year stretch. Pity, too. He was an artist in his line, that fellow. And his taste in neckties I have never seen equaled." The Butterfly Man's voice, evenly pitched and pleasantly modulated, a cultivated voice, was quite casual.

He gathered his tools together and replaced them in the old worn case. "Wonder if that safe is a side-bolt?" he mused. "Most likely. I dare say it 's only the average combination. A one-armed yegg could open most of the boxes in this town with a tin button-hook. Anyhow, it would have to be a new-laid lock *I* could n't open. If he 's left the letters in the safe we 're all right —so here 's hoping he has. I certainly don't want to go to his room unless I have to. Hunter 's not the sort to sit on his hands, and I 'm not feeling what you 'd call real amiable."

A glance at his face, with little glinting devil-lights shining far back in his eyes, set me to babbling:

"Oh, no, no, no, no, that would never do! God forbid that you should go to his rooms! He must have left them in the safe! He had to leave them in the safe!"

"Sure he 's left them in the safe: why should n't he?" he made light of my palpable fears. Slipping into his gray overcoat, he pulled on his felt hat, thrust his hands into his wellworn dogskin gloves, and picked up the package. Nobody in the world ever looked less like a criminal than this brown-faced, keen-eyed man with his

pleasant bearing. Why, this was John Flint, the kindly bug-hunter all Appleboro loved, "that good and kind and Christian man, our brother John Flint, sometimes known as the Butterfly Man."

"Now, don't you worry any at all, parson," he was saying. "There 's nothing to be afraid of. I 'll take care of myself, and I 'll get those letters if they 're in existence. I 've got to get them. What else was I born for, I 'd like to know?"

The question caught me like a lash across the face.

"You were born," I said violently, "to win an honored name, to do a work of inestimable value. And you are deliberately and quixotically risking it, and I allow you to risk it, because a girl's happiness hangs in the balance! If you are detected it means your own ruin, for you could never explain away those tools. Yes! You are facing possible ruin and disgrace. You might have to give up your work for years—have you considered that? Oh, John Flint, stop a moment, and reflect! There is nothing in this for you, John, nothing but danger. No, there 's nothing in it for you, except—"

He held up his hand, with a gesture of dignity and reproach.

"—except that I get my big chance to step in and save the girl I happen to love, from persecution and wretchedness, if not worse," said he simply. "If I can do that, what the devil does it matter what happens to *me?* You talk about name and career! Man, man, what could anything be worth to me if I had to know she was unhappy?"

The tides of emotion rushed over him and flooded his face into a shining-eyed passion nakedly unashamed and

beautiful. And I had thought him casual, carelessly accepting a risk!

"Parson," he wondered, "did n't you *know?* No, I suppose it would n't occur to anybody that a man of my sort should love a girl of hers. But I do. I think I did the first time I ever laid eyes on her, and she a girl-kid in a red jacket, with curls about her shoulders and a face like a little new rose in the morning. Remember her eyes, parson, how blue they were? And how she looked at me, so friendly—*me,* mind you, as I was! And she handed me a Catocala moth, and she gave me Kerry. 'You 're such a good man, Mr. Flint!' says she, and by God, she meant it! Little Mary Virginia! And she got fast hold of something in me that was never anybody's but hers, that could n't ever belong to anybody but her, no, not if I lived for a thousand years and had the pick of the earth.

"It was n't until she came back, though, that I knew I belonged to her who could never belong to me. If I was dead at one end of the world and she dead at the other, we could n't be any farther apart than life has put us two who can see and speak to each other every day!"

"And yet—" he looked at me now and laughed boyishly, "and yet it is n't for Mayne, that she loves, it is n't for you, nor Eustis, nor any man but me alone to help her, by being just what I am and what I have been! Risks? Fail her? *I?* I could n't fail her. I 'll get those letters for her to-night, if Hunter has hidden them in the beam of his eye!" He turned to me with a sudden white glare of ferocity that appalled me. "I could kill him with my hands," said he, with a quiet cold deadliness to chill one's marrow, "and Inglesby after him, for

what they 've made her endure! When I think of to-night—that brute daring to touch *her* with his swine's mouth—I—I—"

His face was convulsed; but after a moment's fierce struggle the disciplined spirit conquered.

"No, there 's been enough trouble for her without that, so they 're safe from me, the both of them. I would n't do anything to imperil her happiness to save my own life. She was born to be happy—and she 's going to have her chance. *I 'll* see to that, Mary Virginia!"

The man seemed to grow, to expand, to tower giant-like before me. Next to the white heat of this lava-flow of pure feeling, all other loves lavished upon Mary Virginia during her fortunate life seemed dwarfed and petty. Beside it Inglesby's furious desire shrunk into a loathsome thing, small and crawling; and my own affection was only an old priest's; and even the strong and faithful love of Laurence appeared pale and boyish in the light of this majestic passion which gave all and in return asked only the right to serve and to save.

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death . . .

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

Trying desperately to cling to such rags and tatters of common sense as I could lay hold upon:

"There is your duty to yourself," I managed to say. "Yes, yes, one owes a great duty to oneself and one's work, John. You are risking too much—name, friends, honor, work, freedom. For God's sake, John, do not

underestimate the danger. You have not had time to consider it."

"Ho! Listen to the parson preaching self-interest!" he mocked. "He 's a fine one to do that—at this hour of his life!"

"I tell you you endanger everything," I insisted. I might bring that package, but at least he should n't rush upon the knife unwarned.

"I know that—I 'm no fool. And *I* tell *you* it 's worth while. To-night makes me and my whole life worth while, the good and the bad of it together. Risks? I 'll take all that 's coming. You stay here and say some prayers for me, parson, if it makes you feel any better. As for me, I 'm off."

At that I lost my every last shred of commonplace everyday sanity, and let myself swing without further reserve into the wild current of the night.

"Oh, very well!" said I shrilly. "You will take chances, you will run risks, *hein?* My friend, you do not stir out of this house this night without *me!*" He stared, as well he might, but I folded my arms and stared back. Let him leave me, bent on such an errand? I to sit at home idly, awaiting the issue, whatever it might be?

"I mean it, John Flint. I am going with you. Was it not I, then, who saved those tools and had them ready to your hand? Whatever happens to you now happens to me as well. It is quite useless for you to argue, to scowl, to grind the teeth, to swear like that. And it will be dangerous to try to trick me: I am going!"

For he was protesting, violently and profanely. His profanity was so sincere, so earnest, so heartfelt, that it

mounted into heights of real eloquence. Also, he did everything but knock me down and lock me indoors.

"Whatever happens to you happens to me," I repeated doggedly, and I was not to be moved. I had a hazy notion that somehow my being with him might protect him in case of any untoward happening, and minimize his risks.

I ran into his bedroom and clapped his best hat on my head, leaving my biretta on his bed; and I put on his new dark overcoat over my cassock. Both the borrowed garments were too big for me, the hat coming down over my ears, the coat-sleeves over my hands. I being as thin as a peeled willow-wand, and the clothes hanging upon me as on a clothes-rack, I dare say I cut a sad and ludicrous figure enough. Flint, standing watching me with his burglarious bundle under his arm, gave an irrepressible chuckle and his eyes crinkled.

"Parson," said he solemnly, "I 've seen all sorts and sizes and colors and conditions of crooks, up and down the line, in my time and generation, but take it from me you 're a libel and an outrage on the whole profession. Why, you crazy he-angel, you 'd break their hearts just to look at you!" And he grinned. At a moment like that, he grinned, with a sort of gay and light-hearted *diablerie*. They are a baffling and inexplicable folk, the Irish. I suppose God loves the Irish because He does n't really know how else to take them.

"It will break my own heart, and possibly my mother's and Mary Virginia's will break to keep it company, if anything evil happens to you this night," said I, severely. I was in no grinning humor, me.

He reached over and carefully buttoned, with one

hand, the too-big collar about my throat. For a moment, with that odd, little-boy gesture of his, he held on to my sleeve. He looked down at me; and his eyes grew wide, his face melted into a whimsical tenderness.

"When you get to heaven, parson, you 'll keep them all busy a hundred years and a day trying to cut and make a suit of sky clothes big enough to fit your real measure," said he, irrelevantly. "You real thing in holy sports, come on, since you 've got to!" With that he blew out the light, and we stepped into the cold and windy night. It was ten minutes after three.

Armed with bottle-belt, knapsack, and net, many a happy night had I gone forth with the Butterfly Man a-hunting for such as we might find of our chosen prey. Armed now with nothing more nor less formidable than the black rosary upon which my hand shut tightly, I, Armand De Rancé, priest and gentleman, walked forth with Slippy McGee in those hours when deep sleep falls upon the spirit of man, for to aid and encourage and abet and assist and connive at, nothing more nor less than burglary.

CHAPTER XIX

THE I O U OF SLIPPY MC GEE

THE wind that precedes the dawn was blowing, a freakish and impish wind though not a vicious one. One might imagine it animated by those sportive and capricious nature-spirits an old Father of the church used to call the monkeys of God. Every now and then a great deluge of piled-up clouds broke into tossing billows and went rolling and tumbling across the face of the sky, and in and out of these swirling masses the high moon played hide-and-seek and the stars showed like pin-points. Such street lights as we have being extinguished at midnight, the tree-shaded sidewalks were in impenetrable shadow, the gardens that edged them were debatable ground, full of grotesque silhouettes, backgrounded by black bulks of silent houses all profoundly asleep. As for us, we also were shadows, whose feet were soundless on the sandy sidewalks. We moved in the dark like travelers in the City of Dreadful Night.

And so we came at last to the red-brick bank, approaching it by the long stretch of the McCall garden which adjoins it. For years there have been battered "For Sale" signs tacked onto its trees and fences, but no one ever came nearer purchasing the McCall property than asking the price. Folks say the McCalls believe that Appleboro is going to rival New York some

of these days, and are holding their garden for skyscraper sites.

I was very grateful to the McCall estimate of Appleboro's future, for the long stretch shadowed by their overgrown shrubbery brought us to the door leading to the upstair offices, without any possible danger of detection.

The bank had been a stately old home before business seized upon it, tore out its whole lower floors, and converted it into a strong and commodious bank. It is the one building in all Appleboro that keeps a light burning all night, a proceeding some citizens regard as unnecessary and extravagant; for is not Old Man Jackson there employed as night watchman? Old Man Jackson lost a finger and a piece of an ear before Appomattox, and the surrender deprived him of all opportunity to repay in kind. It was his cherished hope that "some smartybus crooks 'd try to git in my bank some uh these hyuh nights—an' I cert'nly hope to God they 'll be Yankees, that 's all."

Somehow, they had n't tried. Perhaps they had heard of Old Man Jackson's watchful waiting and knew he was n't at all too proud to fight. His quarters was a small room in the rear of the building, which he shared with a huge gray tomcat named Mosby. With those two on guard, Appleboro knew its bank was as impregnable as Gibraltar. But as nobody could possibly gain entrance to the vaults from above, the upper portion of the building, given over to offices, was of course quite unguarded.

One reached these upper offices by a long walled passageway to the left, where the sidewall of the bank ad-

joins the McCall garden. The door leading to this stairway is not flush with the street, but is set back some feet; this forms a small alcove, which the light flickering through the bank's barred windows does not quite reach.

John Flint stepped into this small cavern and I after him. As if by magic the locked door opened, and we moved noiselessly up the narrow stairs with tin signs tacked on them. At the head of the flight we paused while the flashlight gave us our bearings. Here a short passage opens into the wide central hall. Inglesby's offices are to the left, with the windows opening upon the tangled wilderness of the McCall place.

Right in front of us half a dozen sets of false teeth, arranged in a horrid circle around a cigar-box full of extracted molars such as made one cringe, grinned bitingly out of a glass case before the dentist's office door. The effect was of a lipless and ghastly laugh.

Before the next door a fatuously smiling pink-and-white bust simpered out of the Beauty Parlor's display-case, a bust elaborately coiffured with pounds of yellow hair in which glittered rhinestone buckles. Hair of every sort and shade and length was clustered about her, as if she were the presiding genius of some barbarian scalping-cult. Seen at that hour, in the pale luster of the flashlight, this sorry plunder of lost teeth and dead hair made upon one a melancholy impression, disparaging to humanity. I had scant time to moralize on hair and teeth, however, for Flint was stopping before a door the neat brass plate of which bore upon it:

Mr. Inglesby.

Mr. Inglesby had a desk downstairs in the bank, in the little pompous room marked "President's Office," where at stated hours and times he presided grandly; just as he had a big bare office at the mills, where he was rather easy of access, willing to receive any one who might chance to catch him in. But these rooms we were entering without permission were the sanctum sanctorum, the center of that wide web whose filaments embraced and ensnared the state. It would be about as easy to stroll casually into the Vatican for an informal chat with the Holy Father, to walk unannounced into the presence of the Dalai Lama, or to drop in neighborly on the Tsar of all the Russias, as to penetrate unasked into these offices during the day.

We stepped upon the velvet square of carpet covering the floor of what must have once been a very handsome guest chamber and was now a very handsome private office. One had to respect the simple and solid magnificence of the mahogany furnishings, the leather-covered chairs, the big purposeful desk. Above the old-fashioned marble mantel hung a life-sized portrait in oils of Inglesby himself. The artist had done his sitter stern justice—one might call the result retribution; and one wondered if Inglesby realized how immensely revealing it was. There he sat, solid, successful, informed with a sort of brutal egotism that never gives quarter. In despite of a malevolent determination to look pleasant, his smile was so much more of a threat than a promise that one could wish for his own sake he had scowled instead. He is a throaty man, is Inglesby; and this, with an uncompromising squareness of forehead, a stiff-

ness of hair, and a hard hint of white in the eyes, lent him a lowering likeness to an unpedigreed bull.

John Flint cast upon this charming likeness one brief and pregnant glance.

"Regular old Durham shorthorn, isn't he?" he commented in a low voice. "Wants to charge right out of his frame and trample. Take a look at that nose, parson—like a double-barreled shotgun, for all the world! Beautiful brute, Inglesby. Makes you think of that minotaur sideshow they used to put over on the Greeks."

In view of Laurence and of Mary Virginia, I saw the resemblance.

Mr. Hunter's office was less formal than Mr. Inglesby's, and furnished with an exact and critical taste alien to Appleboro, where many a worthy citizen's office trappings consist of an alpaca coat, a chair and a pine table, three or four fly-specked calendars and shabby ledgers, and a box of sawdust. To these may sometimes be added a pot of paste with a dead cockroach in it, or a hound dog either scratching fleas or snapping at flies.

Here the square of carpet was brown as fallen pine-needles in October, the walls were a soft tan, the ceiling and woodwork ivory-toned. One saw between the windows a bookcase filled with handsomely bound books, and on top of it a few pieces of such old china as would enrapture my mother. The white marble mantel held one or two signed photographs in silver frames, a pair of old candlesticks of quaint and pleasing design, and a dull red pottery vase full of Japanese quince. There were a few good pictures on the walls—a gay impudent Detaille Lancer whose hardy face of a fighting French-

man warmed one's heart; some sketches signed with notable American names; and above the mantel a female form clothed only in the ambient air, her long hair swept back from her shoulders, and a pearl-colored dove alighting upon her outstretched finger.

I suppose one might call the whole room beautiful, for even the desk was of that perfection of simplicity whose cost is as rubies. It was not, however, a womanish room; there was no slightest hint of femininity in its uncluttered, sane, forceful orderliness. It was rather like Hunter himself—polished, perfect, with a note of finality and of fitness upon it like a hall-mark. Nothing out of keeping, nothing overdone. Even the red petal fallen from the pottery vase on the white marble mantel was a last note of perfection.

Flint glanced about him with the falcon-glance that nothing escapes. For a moment the light stayed upon the nude figure over the mantel—the one real nude in all Appleboro, which cherishes family portraits of rakehelly old colonials in wigs, chokers, and tight-fitting smalls, and lolloping ladies with very low necks and sixteen petticoats, but where scandalized church-goers have been known to truss up a little plaster copy of the inane Greek Slave in a pocket-handkerchief, by way of needful drapery.

"What I want to know is, *why* a lady should have to strip to the buff just to play with a pigeon?" breathed John Flint, and his tone was captious.

It did not strike me as being to the last degree whimsical, improbable, altogether absurd, that such a man should pause at such a time to comment upon art as he thinks it is n't. On the contrary it was a consistent

and coherent feature of that astounding nightmare in which we figured. The absurd and the impossible always happen in dreams. I am sure that if the dove on the woman's finger had opened its painted bill and spoken, say about the binomial theorem, or the Effect of Too Much Culture upon Women's Clubs, I should have listened with equal gravity and the same abysmal absence of surprise. I pattered platitudinously:

"The greatest of the Greeks considered the body divine in itself, my son, and so their noblest art was nude. Some moderns have thought there is no real art that is not nude. Truth itself is naked."

"Aha!" said my son, darkly. "I see! You take off your pants when you go out to feed your chickens, say, and you 're not bughouse. You 're art. Well, if Truth is naked, thank God the rest of us are liars!"

What I have here set down was but the matter of a moment. Flint brushed it aside like a cobweb and set briskly about his real business. Over in the recess next to the fireplace was the safe, and before this he knelt.

"Hold the light!" he ordered in a curt whisper. "There—like that. Steady now." My hand closed as well upon the rosary I carried, and I clung to the beads as the shipwrecked cling to a spar. The familiar feel of them comforted me.

I do not know to this day the make of that safe, nor its actual strength, and I have always avoided questioning John Flint about it. I do know it seemed incredibly strong, big, heavy, ungetatable. There was a dark-colored linen cover on top of it, embroidered with yellow marguerites and their stiff green leaves. And there was a brass fern-jar with claw feet, and rings on the sides

that somehow made me think of fetters upon men's wrists.

"A little lower—to the left. So!" he ordered, and with steady fingers I obeyed. He stood out sharply in the clear oval—the "cleverest crook in all America" at work again, absorbed in his task, expert, a mind-force pitting itself against inanimate opposition. He was smiling.

The tools lay beside him and quite by instinct his hand reached out for anything it needed. I think he could have done his work blindfolded. Once I saw him lay his ear against the door, and I thought I heard a faint click. A gnawing rat might have made something like the noise of the drill biting its way. With this exception an appalling silence hung over the room. I could hardly breathe in it. I gripped the rosary and told it, bead after bead.

"Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death—"

There are moments when time loses its power and ceases to be; before our hour we seem to have stepped out of it and into eternity, in which time does not exist, and wherein there can be no relation of time between events. They stand still, or they stretch to indefinite and incredible lengths—all, all outside of time, which has no power upon them. So it was now. Every fraction of every second of every minute lengthened into centuries, eternities passed between minutes. The hashish-eater knows something of this terror of time, and I seemed to have eaten hashish that night.

I could still see him crouching before the safe; and all the while the eternities stretched and stretched on

either side of us, infinities I could only partly bridge over with Hailmarys and Ourfathers.

"And lead us not into temptation . . . but deliver us from evil . . ."

Although I watched him attentively, being indeed unable to tear my eyes away from him, and although I held the light for him with such a steady hand, I really do not know what he did, nor how he forced that safe. I understand it took him a fraction over fourteen minutes.

"Here she comes!" he breathed, and the heavy door was open, revealing the usual interior, with ledgers, and a fairsized steel money-vault, which also came open a moment later. Flint glanced over the contents, and singled out from other papers two packages of letters held together by stout elastic bands, and with pencil notations on the corner of each envelope, showing the dates. He ran over both, held up the smaller of the two, and I saw, with a grasp of inexpressible relief, the handwriting of Mary Virginia.

He locked the vault, shut the heavy door of the rifled safe, and began to gather his tools together.

"You have forgotten to put the other packages back," I reminded him. I was in a raging fever of impatience to be gone, to fly with the priceless packet in my hand.

"No, I 'm not forgetting. I saw a couple of the names on the envelopes and I rather think these letters will be a whole heap interesting to look over," said he, imperturbably. "It 's a hunch, parson, and I 've gotten in the habit of paying attention to hunches. I 'll risk it on these, anyhow. They 're in suspicious company and

I 'd like to know why." And he thrust the package into the crook of his arm, along with the tools.

The light was carefully flashed over every inch of the space we had traversed, to make sure that no slightest trace of our presence was left. As we walked through Inglesby's office John Flint ironically saluted the life-like portrait:

"You 've had a ring twisted in your nose for once, old sport!" said he, and led me into the dark hall. We moved and the same exquisite caution we had exercised upon entering, for we could n't afford to have Dan Jackson's keen old ears detect footfalls overhead at that hour of the morning. Now we were at the foot of the long stairs, and Flint had soundlessly opened and closed the last door between us and freedom. And now we were once more in the open air, under the blessed shadow of the McCall trees, and walking close to their old weather-beaten fence. The light was still shining in the bank, and I knew that that redoubtable old rebel of a watchman was peacefully sleeping with his gray guerilla of a marauding cat beside him. He could afford to sleep in peace. He had not failed in his trust, for the intruders had no designs upon the bank's gold. Questioned, he could stoutly swear that nobody had entered the building. In proof, were not all doors locked? Who should break into a man's office and rob his safe just to get a package of love-letters—if Inglesby made complaint?

I remember we stood leaning against the McCall fence for a few minutes, for my strength had of a sudden failed, my head spun like a top, and my legs wavered under me.

"Buck up!" said Flint's voice in my ear. "It 's all over, and the baby 's named for his Poppa!" His arm went about me, an arm like a steel bar. Half led, half carried, I went staggering on beside him like a drunken man, clutching a rosary and a packet of love-letters.

The streets were still dark and deserted, the whole town slept. But over in the east, when one glimpsed the skies above the trees, a nebulous gray was stealing upon the darkness; and the morning star blazed magnificently, in a space that seemed to have been cleared for it. Somewhere, far off, an ambitious rooster crowed to make the sun rise.

It took us a long time to reach home. It was all of a quarter past four when we turned into the Parish House gate, cut across the garden, and reached Flint's rooms. Faint, trembling in every limb, I fell into a chair, and through a mist saw him kneel and blow upon the coals of the expiring fire, upon which he dropped a lightwood knot. A ruddy glow went dancing up the chimney. Then he was beside me again. Very gently he removed hat and overcoat. And then I was sitting peacefully in the Morris chair, in my old cassock, and with my own old biretta on my head; and there was no longer that thin buzzing, shrill and torturing as a mosquito's, singing in my ears. At my knee stood Kerry, with his beautiful hazel eyes full of a grave concern; and beside him, calm and kind and matter-of-fact, the Butterfly Man himself stood watching me with an equal regard. I rubbed my forehead. The incredible had happened, and like all incredible things it had been almost ridiculously simple and easy of accomplishment. Here we were, we two, priest and naturalist, in our own workroom, with

an old dog wagging his tail beside us. Could anything be more commonplace? The last trace of nightmare vanished, as smoke dispelled by the wind. If Mary Virginia's letters had not been within reach of my hand I would have sworn I was just awake out of a dream of that past hour.

"She has escaped from them, they cannot touch her, she is free!" I exulted. "John, John, you have saved our girl! No matter what they do to Eustis they can't drag her into the quicksands *now.*"

But he went walking up and down, shoulders squared, face uplifted. One might think that after such a night he would have been humanly tired, but he had clean forgotten his body. His eyes shone as with a flame lit from inward, and I think there was on him what the Irish people call the *Aisling,* the waking vision. For presently he began to speak, as to Somebody very near him.

"Oh, Lord God!" said the Butterfly Man, with a reverent and fierce joy, "she 's going to have her happiness now, and it was n't holy priest nor fine gentleman you picked out to help her toward it—it was me, Slippy McGee, born in the streets and bred in the gutter, with the devil knows who for his daddy and a name that 's none of his own! For that I 'm Yours for keeps: *You 've got me.*

"You 've done all even God Almighty can do, given me more than I ever could have asked You for—and now it 's up to me to make good—and I 'll do it!"

There came to listening me something of the emotion I experienced when I said my first Mass—as if I had been brought so close to our Father that I could have put out my hand and touched Him. Ah! I had

had a very small part to play in this man's redemption. I knew it now, and felt humbled and abashed, and yet grateful that even so much had been allowed me. Not I, but Love, had transformed a sinner and an outlaw into a great scientist and a greater lover. And I remembered Mary Virginia's childish hand putting into his the gray-winged Catocala, and how the little moth, raising the sad-colored wings worn to suit his surroundings, revealed beneath that disfiguring and disguising cloak the exquisite and flower-like loveliness of the underwings.

He paused in his swinging stride, and looked down at me a bit shyly.

"Parson—you see how it is with me?"

"I see. And I think she is the greater lady for it and you the finer gentleman," said I stoutly. "It would honor her, if she were ten times what she is—and she is Mary Virginia."

"She is Mary Virginia," said the Butterfly Man, "and I am—what I am. Yet somehow I feel sure I can care for her, that I can go right on caring for her to the end of time, without hurt to her or sorrow to me." And after a pause, he added, deliberately:

"I found something better than a package of letters to-night, parson. I found—*Me.*"

For awhile neither of us spoke. Then he said, speculatively:

"Folks give all sorts of things to the church—dedicate them in gratitude for favors they fancy they 've received, don't they? Lamps, and models of ships, and glass eyes and wax toes and leather hands, and crutches and braces, and that sort of plunder? Well, I 'm moved to make a free-will offering myself. I 'm going to give

the church my kit, and you can take it from me the old Lady will never get her clamps on another set like that until Gabriel blows his trumpet in the morning. Parson, I want you to put those tools back where you had them, for I shall never touch them again. I could n't. They —well, they 're sort of holy from now on. They 're my I O U. Will you do it for me?"

"Yes!" said I.

"I might have known you would!" said he, smiling. "Just one more favor, parson—may I put her letters in her hands, myself?"

"My son, my son, who but you should do that?" I pushed the package across the table.

"Great Scott, parson, here it is striking five o'clock, and you 've been up all night!" he exclaimed, anxiously. "Here—no more gassing. You come lie down on my bed and snooze a bit. I 'll call you in plenty of time for mass."

I was far too spent and tired to move across the garden to the Parish House. I suffered myself to be put to bed like a child, and had my reward by falling almost immediately into a dreamless sleep, nor did I stir until he called me, a couple of hours later. He himself had not slept, but had employed the time in going through the letters open on his table. He pointed to them now, with a grim smile.

"Parson!" said he, and his eyes glittered. "Do you know what we 've stumbled upon? Dynamite! Man, anybody holding that bunch of mail could blow this state wide open! So much for a hunch, you see!"

"You mean—"

"I mean I 've got the cream off Inglesby's most pri-

vate deals, that 's what I mean! I mean I could send him and plenty of his pals to the pen. Everybody 's been saying for years that there has n't been a rotten deal pulled off that he did n't boss and get away with it. But nobody could prove it. He 's had the men higher-up eating out of his hand—sort of you pat my head and I 'll pat yours arrangement—and here 's the proof, in black and white. Don't you understand? Here 's the proof: these get him with the goods!

"These," he slapped a letter, "would make any Grand Jury throw fits, make every newspaper in the state break out into headlines like a kid with measles, and blow the lid off things in general—if they got out.

"Inglesby 's going to shove Eustis under, is he? Not by a jugfull. He 's going to play he 's a patent life-preserver. He 's going to *be* that good Samaritan he 's been shamming. Talk about poetic justice—this will be like wearing shoes three sizes too small for him, with a bunion on every toe!" And when I looked at him doubtfully, he laughed.

"You can't see how it 's going to be managed? Did n't you ever hear of the grapevine telegraph? Well then, dear George receives a grapevine wireless bright and early to-morrow morning. A word to the wise is sufficient."

"He will employ detectives," said I, uneasily.

The Butterfly Man looked at me quizzically.

"*With* an eagle eye and a walrus mustache," said he, grinning. "Sure. But if the plainclothes nose around, are they going to sherlock the parish priest and the town bughunter? *We* have n't got any interest in Mr. Inglesby's private correspondence, have we? Suppose

Miss Eustis's letters are returned to her, what does that prove? Why, nothing at all,—except that it was n't her correspondence the fellows that cracked that safe were after. We should worry!

"Say, though, don't you wish you could see them when they stroll down to those beautiful offices and go for to open that nice burglar-proof safe with the little brass flower-pot on top of it? What a joke! Holy whiskered black cats, what a joke!"

"I 'm afraid Mr. Inglesby's sense of humor is n't his strong point," said I. "Not that I have any sympathy for him. I think he is getting only what he deserves."

"*Alexander the coppersmith wrought me much evil. May God requite him according to his works!*" murmured the Butterfly Man, piously, and chuckled. "Don't worry, parson—Alexander 's due to fall sick with the pip to-day or to-morrow. What do you bet he don't get it so bad he 'll have to pull up all his pretty plans by the roots, leave Mr. Hunter in charge, and go off somewhere to take mudbaths for his liver? Believe me, he 'll need them! Why, the man won't be able to breathe easy any more—he 'll be expecting one in the solar plexus any minute, not knowing any more than Adam's cat who 's to hand it to him. He can't tell who to trust and who to suspect. If you want to know just how hard Alexander 's going to be requited according to his works, take a look at these." He pointed to the letters.

I did take a look, and I admit I was frightened. It seemed to me highly unsafe for plain folks like us to know such things about such people. I was amazed to the point of stupefaction at the corruption those com-

munications betrayed, the shameless and sordid disregard of law and decency, the brutal and cynical indifference to public welfare. At sight of some of the signatures my head swam—I felt saddened, disillusioned, almost in despair for humanity. I suppose Inglesby had thought it wiser to preserve these letters—possibly for his own safety; but no wonder he had locked them up! I looked at the Butterfly Man openmouthed.

"You would n't think folks wearing such names could be that rotten, would you? Some of them pillars of the church, too, and married to good women, and the fathers of nice kids! Why, I have known crooks that the police of a dozen states were after, that would n't have been caught dead on jobs like some of these. Inglesby won't know it, but he ought to thank his stars *we 've* got his letters instead of the State Attorney, for I shan't use them unless I have to. . . . Parson, you remember a bluejay breaking up a nest on me once, and what Laurence said when I wanted to wring the little crook's neck? That the thing is n't to reform the jay but to keep him from doing it again? That 's the cue."

He gathered up the scattered letters, made a neat package of them, and put it in a table drawer behind a stack of note-books. And then he reached over and touched the other package, the letters written in Mary Virginia's girlish hand.

"Here 's her happiness—long, long years of it ahead of her," he said soberly. "As for you, you take back those tools, and go say mass."

Outside it was broad bright day, a new beautiful day, and the breath of the morning blew sweetly over the world. The Church was full of a clear and early light,

the young pale gold of the new Spring sun. None of the congregation had as yet arrived. Before I went into the sacristy to put on my vestments, I gave back into St. Stanislaus' hands the I O U of Slippy McGee.

CHAPTER XX

BETWEEN A BUTTERFLY'S WINGS

THERE was a glamour upon it. One knew it was going to grow into one of those wonderful and shining days in whose enchanted hours any exquisite miracle might happen. I am perfectly sure that the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of an April day, and that it was a morning in spring when the angels visited Abraham, sitting watchful in the door of his tent.

There was in the air itself something long-missed and come back, a heady and heart-moving delight, a promise, a thrill, a whisper of *"April! April!"* that the Green Things and the hosts of the Little People had heard overnight. In the dark the sleeping souls of the golden butterflies had dreamed it, known it was a true Word, and now they were out, "Little flames of God" dancing in the Sunday sunlight. The Red Gulf Fritillary had heard it, and here she was, all in her fine fulvous frock besmocked with black velvet, and her farthingale spangled with silver. And the gallant Red Admiral, the brave beautiful Red Admiral that had dared unfriendlier gales, trimmed his painted sails to a wind that was the breath of spring.

Over by the gate the spirea had ventured into showering sprays exhaling a shy and fugitive fragrance, and

what had been a blur of gray cables strung upon the oaks had begun to bud with emerald and blossom with amethyst—the wistaria was a-borning. And one knew there was Cherokee rose to follow, that the dogwood was in white, and the year's new mintage of gold dandelions was being coined in the fresh grass.

There was n't a bird that was n't caroling *April!* at the top of his voice from the full of his heart; for was n't the world alive again, was n't it love-time and nest-time, was n't it Spring?

Even to the tired faces of my work-folks that shining morning lent a light that was hope. Without knowing it, they felt themselves a vital part of the reborn world, sharers in its joy because they were the children of the common lot, the common people for whom the world is, and without whom no world could be. Classes, creeds, nations, gods, all these pass and are gone; God, and the common people, and the spring remain.

When I was young I liked as well as another to dwell overmuch upon the sinfulness of sin, the sorrow of sorrow, the despair of death. Now that these three terrible teachers have taught me a truer wisdom and a larger faith, I like better to turn to the glory of hope, the wisdom of love, and the simple truth that death is just a passing phase of life. So I sent my workers home that morning rejoicing with the truth, and was all the happier and hopefuller myself because of it.

Afterwards, when Clélie was giving me my coffee and rolls, the Butterfly Man came in to breakfast with me, a huge roll of those New York newspapers which contain what are mistakenly known as Comic Supplements tucked under his arm.

He said he bought them because they "tasted like New York" which they do not. Just as Major Cartwright explains his purchase of them by the shameless assertion that it just tickles him to death "to see what Godforsaken idjits those Yankees can make of themselves when they half-way try. Why, suh, one glance at their Sunday newspapers ought to prove to any right thinkin' man that it 's safer an' saner to die in South Carolina than to live in New York!"

I think the Butterfly Man and Major Cartwright buy those papers because they think they are *funny!* After they have read and sniggered, they donate them to Clélie and Daddy January. And presently Clélie distributes them to a waiting colored countryside, which wallpapers its houses with them. I have had to counsel the erring and bolster the faith of the backsliding under the goggle eyes of inhuman creations whose unholy capers have made futile many a prayer. And yet the Butterfly Man likes them! Is it not to wonder?

He laid them tenderly upon the table now, and smiled slyly to see me eye them askance.

"Did you know," said he, over his coffee, "that Laurence came in this morning on the six-o'clock? January had him out in the garden showing off the judge's new patent hives, and I stopped on my way to church and shook hands over the fence. It was all I could do to keep from shouting that all 's right with the world, and all he had to do was to be glad. I did n't know how much I cared for that boy until this morning. Parson, it 's a—a terrible thing to love people, when you come to think about it, is n't it? I told him you were honing to see him: and that we 'd be looking for him along about

eleven. And I intimated that if he did n't show up then I 'd go after him with a gun. He said he 'd be here on the stroke." After a moment, he added gently: "I figured they 'd be here by then—Madame and Mary Virginia."

"What! You have induced Laurence to come while she is here—without giving him any intimation that he is likely to meet her?" I said, aghast. "You are a bold man, John Flint!"

The study windows were open and the sweet wind and the warm sun poured in unchecked. The stir of bees, the scent of honey-locust just opening, drifted in, and the slow solemn clangor of church bells, and lilts and flutings and calls and whistlings from the tree-tops. We could see passing groups of our neighbors, fathers and mothers shepherding little flocks of children in their Sunday best, trotting along with demure Sabbath faces on their way to church. The Butterfly Man looked out, waved gaily to the passing children, who waved back a joyous response, nodded to their smiling parents, followed the flight of a tanager's sober spouse, and sniffed the air luxuriously.

"Oh, somebody 's got to stage-manage, parson," he said at last, lightly enough, but with a hint of tiredness in his eyes. "And then vanish behind the scenes, leaving the hero and heroine in the middle of the spotlight, with the orchestra tuning up 'The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden,' " he finished, without a trace of bitterness. "So I sent Madame a note by a little nigger newsie." His eyes crinkled, and he quoted the favorite aphorism of the colored people, when they seem to exercise a meticulous care: "Brer Rabbit say, 'I trus' no mistake.' "

"You are a bold man," said I again, with a respect that made him laugh. Then we went over to his rooms to wait, and while we waited I tried to read a chapter of a book I was anxious to finish, but could n't, my eyes being tempted by the greener and fresher page opening before them. Flint smoked a virulent pipe and read his papers.

Presently he laid his finger upon a paragraph and handed me the paper. . . . And I read where one "Spike" Frazer had been shot to death in a hand-to-hand fight with the police who were raiding a dive suspected of being the rendezvous of drug-fiends. Long wanted and at last cornered, Frazer had fought tigerishly and died in his tracks, preferring death to capture. A sly and secretive creature, he had had a checkered career in the depths. It was his one boast that more than anybody else he had known and been a sort of protegé of the once notorious Slippy McGee, that King of Crooks whose body had been found in the East River some years since, and whose daring and mysterious exploits were not yet altogether forgotten by the police or the underworld.

"*Sic transit gloria mundi!*" said the Butterfly Man in his gentle voice, and looked out over the peaceful garden and the Sunday calm with inscrutable eyes. I returned the paper with a hand that shook. It seemed to me that a deep and solemn hush fell for a moment upon the glory of the day, while the specter of what might have been gibbered at us for the last time.

Out of the heart of that hush walked two women—one little and rosy and white-haired, one tall and pale and beautiful with the beauty upon which sorrow has placed its haunting imprint. Her black hair framed her face as

in ebony, and her blue, blue eyes were shadowed. By an odd coincidence she was dressed this morning just as she had been when the Butterfly Man first saw her—in white, and over it a scarlet jacket. Kerry and little Pitache rose, met them at the gate, and escorted them with grave politeness. The Butterfly Man hastily emptied his pipe and laid aside his newspapers.

"Your note said we were to come, that everything was all right," said my mother, looking up at him with bright and trustful eyes. "Such a relief! Because I know you never say anything you don't mean, John."

He smiled, and with a wave of the hand beckoned us into the workroom. Madame followed him eagerly and expectantly—she knew her John Flint. Mary Virginia came listlessly, dragging her feet, her eyes somber in a smileless face. She could not so quickly make herself hope, she who had journeyed so far into the arid country of despair. But he, with something tender and proud and joyful in his looks, took her unresisting hand and drew her forward.

"Mary Virginia!" I had not known how rich and deep the Butterfly Man's voice could be. "Mary Virginia, we promised you last night that if you would trust us, the Padre and me, we 'd find the right way out, did n't we? Now this is what happened: the Padre took his troubles to the Lord, and the Lord presently sent him back to *me*—with the beginning of the answer in his hand! And here 's the whole answer, Mary Virginia." And he placed in her hand the package of letters that meant so much to her.

My mother gave a little scream. "Armand!" she said, fearfully. "She has told me all. *Mon Dieu,* how

have you two managed this, between midnight and morning? My son, you are a De Rancé: look me in the eyes and tell me there is nothing wrong, that there will be no ill consequences—"

"There won't be any comebacks," said John Flint, with engaging confidence. "As for you, Mary Virginia, you don't have to worry for one minute about what those fellows can do—because they can't do anything. They 're double-crossed. Now listen: when you see Hunter, you are to say to him, '*Thank you for returning my letters.*' Just that and no more. If there 's any questioning, *stare.* Stare hard. If there 's any threatening about your father, *smile.* You can afford to smile. They can't touch him. But *how* those letters came into your hands you are never to tell, you understand? They did come and that 's all that interests you." He began to laugh, softly. "All Hunter will want to know is that you 've received them. He 's too game not to lose without noise, and he 'll make Inglesby swallow his dose without squealing, too. So—you 're finished and done with Mr. Hunter and Mr. Inglesby!" His voice deepened again, as he added gently: "It was just a bad dream, dear girl. It 's gone with the night. Now it 's morning, and you 're awake."

But Mary Virginia, white as wax, stared at the letters in her hand, and then at me, and trembled.

"Trust us, my child," said I, somewhat troubled. "And obey John Flint implicitly. Do just what he tells you to do, say just what he tells you to say."

Mary Virginia looked from one to the other, thrust the package upon me, walked swiftly up to him, and, laying her hands upon his arms stared with passionate ear-

nestness into his face: the kind, wise, lovable face that every child in Appleboro County adores, every woman trusts, every man respects. Her eyes clung to his, and he met that searching gaze without faltering, though it seemed to probe for the root of his soul. It was well for Mary Virginia that those brave eyes had caught something from the great faces that hung upon his walls and kept company and counsel with him day and night, they that conquered life and death and turned defeat into victory because they had first conquered themselves!

"Yes!" said she, with a deep sigh of relief. "I trust you! Thank God for just how much I can believe and trust you!"

I think that meeting face to face that luminous and unfaltering regard, Mary Virginia must have divined that which had heretofore been hidden from her by the man's invincible modesty and reserve; and being most generous and of a large and loving soul herself, I think she realized to the uttermost the magnitude of his gift. Her name, her secure position, her happiness, the hopes that the coming years were to transform into realities —oh, I like to think that Mary Virginia saw all this, in one of those lightning-flashes of spiritual insight that reveal more than all one's slower years; I like to think she saw it given her freely, nobly, with joy, a glorious love-gift from the limping man into whose empty hand she had one day put a little gray underwing!

I glanced at my mother, and saw by her most expressive face that she knew and understood. She had known and understood, long before any of us.

"If I might offer a suggestion," I said in as matter-of-fact a voice as I could command, "it would be,

that the sooner those letters are destroyed, the better."

Mary Virginia took them from me and dropped them on the coals remaining from last night's fire—the last fire of the season. They did not ignite quickly, though they began to turn brown, and thin spirals of smoke arose from them. The Butterfly Man knelt, thrust a handful of lightwood splinters under the pile, and touched a match here and there. When the resinous wood flared up, the letters blazed with it. They blazed and then they crumbled; they disappeared in bits of charred and black paper that vanished at a touch; they were gone while we watched, the girl kneeling upon the hearthrug with her hand on Flint's arm, and I with my old heart singing like a skylark in my breast, and my mother's mild eyes upon us all.

Life and color and beauty flowed back into Mary Virginia's face and music's self sang again in her voice. She was like the day itself, reborn out of a dark last night. When the last bit of blackened paper went swirling up the chimney, and the two of them had risen, the most beautiful and expressive eyes under heaven looked up like blue and dewy flowers into the Butterfly Man's face. She was too wise and too tender to try to thank him in words, and never while they two lived would this be again referred to so much as once by either; but she took his hand, palm upward, gave him one deep long upward glance, and then bent her beautiful head and dropped into the center of his palm a kiss, and closed the fingers gently over it for everlasting keeping and remembrance. The eyes brimmed over then, and two large tears fell upon his hand and washed her kiss in, indelibly.

None of us four had the power of speech left us. Heaven knows what we should have done, if Laurence had n't opened the door at that moment and walked in upon us. I don't think he altogether sensed the tenseness of the situation which his coming relieved, but he went pale at sight of Mary Virginia, and he would have left incontinently if my mother, with a joyous shriek, had n't pounced upon him.

"Laurence! Why, Laurence! But we did n't expect you home until to-morrow night!" said she, kissing him motherly. "My dear, dear boy, how glad I am to see you! What happy wind blew you home to-day, Laurence?"

"Oh, I finished my work ahead of schedule and got away just as soon as I could," Laurence briefly and modestly explained thus that he had won his case. He edged toward the door, avoiding Mary Virginia's eyes. He had bowed to her with formal politeness. He wondered at the usually tactful Madame's open effort to detain him. It was a little too much to expect of him!

"I just ran in to see how you all were," he tried to be very casual. "See you later, Padre. 'By, p'tite Madame. 'By, Flint." He bowed again to Mary Virginia, whose color had altogether left her, and who stood there most palpably nervous and distressed.

"Laurence!" The Butterfly Man spoke abruptly. "Laurence, if a chap was dying of thirst and the water of life was offered him, he 'd be considerable of a fool to turn his head aside and refuse to see it, would n't he?"

Laurence paused. Something in the Butterfly Man's face, something in mine and Madame's, but, above all,

something in Mary Virginia's, arrested him. He stood wavering, and my mother released his arm.

"I take it," said John Flint, boldly plunging to the very heart of the matter, "I take it, Laurence, that you still care a very great deal for this dear girl of ours?" And now he had taken her hand in his and held it comfortingly. "More, say, than you could ever care for anybody else, if you lived to rival Methusaleh? So much, Laurence, that not to be able to believe she cares the same way for you takes the core out of life?" His manner was simple and direct, and so kind that one could only answer him in a like spirit. Besides, Laurence loved the Butterfly Man even as Jonathan loved David.

"Yes," said the boy honestly, "I still care for her—like that. I always did. I always will. She knows." But his voice was toneless.

"Of course you do, kid brother," said Flint affectionately. "Don't you suppose I know? But it 's just as well for you to say it out loud every now and then. Fresh air is good for everything, particularly feelings. Keeps 'em fresh and healthy. Now, Mary Virginia, you feel just the same way about Laurence, don't you?" And he added: "Don't be ashamed to tell the most beautiful truth in the world, my dear. Well?"

She went red and white. She looked entreatingly into the Butterfly Man's face. She did n't exactly see why he should drive her thus, but she caught courage from his. One saw how wise Flint had been to have snared Laurence here just now. One moment she hesitated. Then:

"Yes!" said she, and her head went up proudly. "Yes, oh, yes, I care—like that. Only much, much more!

I shall always care like that, although he probably won't believe me now when I say so. And I can't blame him for doubting me."

"But it just happens that I have never been able to make myself doubt you," said Laurence gravely. "Why, Mary Virginia, you are *you.*"

"Then, Laurence," said the Butterfly Man, quickly, "will you take your old friends' word for it—mine, Madame's, the Padre's—that you were most divinely right to go on believing in her and loving her, because she never for one moment ceased to be worthy of faith and affection? No, not for one moment! She could n't, you know. She 's Mary Virginia! And will you promise to listen with all your patience to what she may think best to tell you presently—and then forget it? You 're big enough to do that! She 's been in sore straits, and she needs all the love you have, to help make up to her. Can she be sure of it, Laurence?"

Laurence flushed. He looked at his old friend with reproach in his fine brown eyes. "You have known me all my life, all of you," said he, stiffly. "Have I ever given any of you any reason to doubt me?"

"No, and we don't. Not one of us. But it 's good for your soul to say things out loud," said Flint comfortably. "And now you 've said it, don't you think you two had better go on over to the Parish House parlor, which is a nice quiet place, and talk this whole business over and out—together?"

Laurence looked at Mary Virginia and what he saw electrified him. Boyishness flooded him, youth danced in his eyes, beauty was upon him, like sunlight.

"Mary Virginia!" said the boy lover to the girl sweet-

heart, "is it really so? I was really right to believe all along that you—care?"

"Laurence, Laurence!" she was half-crying. "Oh, Laurence, are you sure *you* care—yet? You are sure, Laurence? You are *sure?* Because—I—I don't think I could stand things now if—if I were mistaken—"

I don't know whether the boy ran to the girl at that, or the girl to the boy. I rather think they ran to each other because, in another moment, perfectly regardless of us, they were clinging to each other, and my mother was walking around them and crying heartily and shamelessly, and enjoying herself immensely. Mary Virginia began to stammer:

"Laurence, if you only knew—Laurence, if it was n't for John Flint—and the Padre—" The two of them had the two of us, each by an arm; and the Butterfly Man was brick-red and furiously embarrassed, he having a holy horror of being held up and thanked.

"Why, I did what I did," said he, uncomfortably. "But,"—he brightened visibly—"if you *will* have the truth, have it. If it was n't for this blessed brick of a parson I 'd never have been in a position to do anything for anybody. Don't you forget that!"

"What ridiculous nonsense the man talks!" said I, exasperated by this shameless casuistry. "John Flint raves. As for me—"

"As for you," said he with deep reproach, "you ought to know better than to tell such a thumping lie at this time of your life. I 'm ashamed of you, parson! Why, you know good and well—"

"Why, John Flint, you—" I began, aghast.

My mother began to laugh. "For heaven's sake,

thank them both and have done with it!" said she, a bit hysterically. "God alone knows how they managed, but this thing lies between them, the two great geese. Did one ever hear the like?"

"Madame is right, as always," said Laurence gravely. "Remember, I don't know anything yet, except that somehow you 've brought Mary Virginia and me back to each other. That 's enough for *me*. I have n't got any questions to ask." His voice faltered, and he gripped us by the hand in turn, with a force that made me, for one, wince and cringe. "And Padre—Bughunter, you both know that I—" he could n't finish.

"That we—" choked Mary Virginia.

"Sure we know," said the Butterfly Man hastily. "Don't you know you 're our kids and we 've got to know?" He began to edge them towards the door. I think his courage was getting a little raw about the corners. "Yes, you two go on over to the Parish House parlor, where you 'll have a chance to talk without being interrupted—Madame will see to that—and don't you show your noses outside of that room until everything 's settled the one and only way everything ought to be settled." His eyes twinkled as he manœuvered them outside, and then stood in the doorway to watch them walk away—beautiful, youthful, radiantly happy, and very close together, the girl's head just on the level of the boy's shoulder. He was still faintly smiling when he came back to us; if there was pain behind that smile, he concealed it. My mother ran to him, impulsively.

"John Flint!" said she, profoundly moved and earnest. "John Flint, the good God never gave me but one child, though I prayed for more. Often and often

have I envied her silly mother Mary Virginia. But now. John, I know that if I could have had another child that, after Armand, I 'd love best and respect most and be proudest of in this world, it would be *you*. Yes, *you*. John Flint, you are the best man, and the bravest and truest and most unselfish, and the finest gentleman, outside of my husband and my son, that I have ever known. What makes it all the more wonderful is that you 're a genius along with it. I am proud of you, and glad of you, and I admire and love you with all my heart. And I really wish you 'd call me mother. You should have been born a De Rancé!"

This, from my mother! I was amazed. Why, she would think she was flattering one of the seraphim if she had said to him, "You might have been a De Rancé!"

"Madame!" stammered Flint, "why, Madame!"

"Oh, well, never mind, then. Let it go at Madame, since it would embarrass you to change. But I look upon you as my son, none the less. I claim you from this hour," said she firmly, as one not to be gainsaid.

"I 'm beginning to believe in fairy-stories," said Flint. "The beggar comes home—and he is n't a beggar at all, he 's a Prince. Because the Queen is his mother."

My mother looked at him approvingly. The grace of his manner, and the unaffected feeling of his words, pleased her. But she said no more of what was in her heart for him. She fell back. as women do, upon the safe subject of housekeeping matters.

"I suppose," she mused, "that those children will remain with us to-day? Yes, of course. Armand, we shall have the last of your great-grandfather's wine.

And I am going to send over for the judge. Let me see: shall I have time for a cake with frosting? H'm! Yes, I think so. Or would you prefer wine jelly with whipped cream, John?"

He considered gravely, one hand on his hip, the other stroking his beard.

"Could n't we have both?" he wondered hopefully. "Please! Just for this once?"

"We could! We shall!" said my mother, grandly, recklessly, extravagantly. "Adieu, then, children of my heart! I go to confer with Clélie." She waved her hand and was gone.

The place shimmered with sun. Old Kerry lay with his head between his paws and dozed and dreamed in it, every now and then opening his hazel eyes to make sure that all was well with his man. All outdoors was one glory of renewing life, of stir and growth, of loving and singing and nest-building. and the budding of new green leaves and the blossoming of April boughs. Just such April hopes were theirs who had found each other again this morning. All of life at its best and fairest stretched sunnily before those two, the fairer for the cloud that had for a time darkened it, the dearer and diviner for the loss that had been so imminent.

. . . That was a redbird again. And now a vireo. And this the mockingbird, love-drunk, emptying his heart of a troubadour in a song of fire and dew. And on a vagrant air, a gipsy air, the scent of the honey-locust. The spring for all the world else. But for him I loved,—what?

I suppose my wistful eyes betrayed me, for used to the changing expressions of my thin visage, he smiled;

and stood up, stretching his arms above his head. He drew in great mouthfuls of the sweet air, and expanded his broad chest.

"I feel full to the brim!" said he gloriously. "I 've got almost too much to hold with both hands! Parson, parson, it is n't possible you 're fretting over *me?* Sorry for *me?* Why, man, consider!"

Ah, but had I not considered? I knew, I thought, what he had to hold fast to. Honor, yes. And the friendship of some and the admiration of many and the true love of the few, which is all any man may hope for and more than most attain. Outside of that, a gray moth, and a butterfly's wing, and a torn nest, and a child's curl, and a ragdoll in her grave; and now a girl's kiss on the palm and a tear to hallow it. But I who had greatly loved and even more greatly lost and suffered, was it not for me of all men to know and to understand?

"But I have got the thing itself," said the Butterfly Man, "that makes everything else worth while. Why, I have been taught how to love! My work is big—but by itself it was n't enough for me. I needed something more. So I was swept and empty and ready and waiting—when she came. Now had n't there got to be something fine and decent in me, when it was she alone out of all the world I was waiting for and could love?"

"Yes, yes. But oh, my son, my son!"

"Oh, it was bad and bitter enough at first, parson. Because I wanted her so much! Great God, I was like a soul in hell! After awhile I crawled out of hell—on my hands and knees. But I 'd begun to understand things. I 'd been taught. It 'd been burnt into me

past forgetting. Maybe that 's what hell is for, if folks only knew it. Could anything ever happen to anybody any more that I could n't understand and be sorry for, I wonder?

"No, don't you worry any about me. I would n't change places with anybody alive, I 'm too glad for everything that 's ever happened to me, good and bad. I 'm not ashamed of the beginning, no, nor I 'm not afraid of the end.

"Will you believe me, though, when I tell you what worried me like the mischief for awhile? Family, parson! You can't live in South Carolina without having the seven-years' Family-itch wished on you, you know. I felt like a mushroom standing up on my one leg all by myself among a lot of proper garden plants—until I got fed up on the professional Descendant banking on his boneyard full of dead ones; then I quit worrying. I 'm Me and alive—and I should worry about ancestors! Come to think about it, everybody 's an ancestor while you wait. I made up my mind I 'd be my own ancestor and my own descendant—and make a good job of both while I was at it."

But I was too sad to smile. And after awhile he asked gently:

"Are you grieving because you think I 've lost love? Parson, did you ever know something you did n't know how you knew, but you know you know it because it 's true? Well then—I know that girl 's mine and I came here to find her, though on the face of it you 'd think I 'd lost her, would n't you? Somewhere and sometime I 'll come again—and when I do, she 'll know *me.*"

And to save my life I could n't tell him I did n't believe it! His manner even more than his words impressed me. He did n't look improbable.

"One little life and one little death," said the Butterfly Man, "could n't possibly be big enough for something like this to get away from a man forever. I have got the thing too big for a dozen lives to hold. Is n't that a great deal for a man to have, parson?"

"Yes." said I. "It is a great deal for a man to have." But I foresaw the empty, empty places, in the long, long years ahead. I added faintly: "Having that much, you have more than most."

"You only have what you are big enough not to take," said he. "And I 'm not fooling myself I shan't be lonesome and come some rough tumbles at times. The difference is, that if I go down now I won't stay down. If there was one thing I could grieve over, too, it would be —kids. I 'd like kids. My own kids. And I shall never have any. It—well, it just would n't be fair to the kids. Louisa 'll come nearest to being mine by bornation—though I 'm thinking she 's managed to wish me everybody else's, on her curl."

"So! You are your own ancestor and your own descendant, and everybody's kids are yours! You are modest, *hein?* And what else have you got?"

His eyes suddenly danced. "Nothing but the rest of the United States," said the Butterfly Man, magnificently. And when I stared, he laughed at me.

"It 's quite true, parson: I have got the whole United States to work for. Uncle Sam. U. S. *Us!* I 've been drafted into the Brigade that has n't any commander,

nor any colors, nor honors, nor even a name; but that 's never going to be mustered out of service, because we that enlist and belong can't and won't quit.

"Parson, think of *me* representing the Brigade down here on the Carolina coast, keeping up the work, fighting things that hurt and finding out things that help? Lord, what a chance! A hundred millions to work for, a hundred millions of one's own people—and a trail to blaze for the unborn millions to come!" His glance kindled, his face was like a lighted lamp. The vision was upon him, standing there in the April sunlight, staring wide-eyed into the future.

Its reflected light illumined me, too—a little. And I saw that in a very large and splendid sense, this was the true American. He stood almost symbolically for that for which America stands—the fighting chance to overcome and to grow, the square deal, the spirit that looks eagle-eyed and unafraid into the sunrise. And above all for unselfish service and unshakable faith, and a love larger than personal love, prouder than personal pride, higher than personal ambition. They do not know America who do not know and will not see this spirit in her, going its noble and noiseless way apart.

"The whole world to work for, and a whole lifetime to do it in!" said the voice of America, exultant. "Lord God, that 's a man-sized job, but You just give me hands and eyes and time, and I 'll do the best I can. You 've done Your part by me—stand by, and I 'll do mine by You!"

Are those curious coincidences, those circumstances which occur at such opportune moments that they leave

one with a sense of a guiding finger behind the affairs of men—are they, after all, only fortuitous accidents, or have they a deeper and a diviner significance?

There stood the long worktable, with orderly piles of work on it; the microscope in its place; the books he had opened and pushed aside last night; and some half-dozen small card-board boxes in a row, containing the chrysalids he had been experimenting with, trying the effect of cold upon color. The cover of one box had been partially pushed off, possibly when he had moved the books. And while we had been paying attention to other things, one of these chrysalids had been paying strict attention to its own business, the beautiful and important business of becoming a butterfly. Flint discovered it first, and gave a pleased exclamation.

"Look! Look! A Turnus, father! The first Turnus of the year!"

The insect had been out for an hour or two, but was not yet quite ready to fly. It had crawled out of the half-opened box, dragged its wormy length across the table, over intervening obstacles, seeking some place to climb up and cling to.

Now the Butterfly Man had left the Bible open, merely shoving it aside without shutting it, when he had found no comfort for himself last night in what John had to say. Protected by piled-up books and propped almost upright by the large inkstand, it gave the holding-place the insect desired. The butterfly had walked up the page and now clung to the top.

There she rested, her black-and-yellow body quivering like a tiny live dynamo from the strong force of circulation, that was sending vital fluids upward into the wings

to give them power and expansion. We had seen the same thing a thousand and one times before, we should see it a thousand and one times again. But I do not think either of us could ever forego the delight of watching a butterfly's wings shaping themselves for flight, and growing into something of beauty and of wonder. The lovely miracle is ever new to us.

She was a big butterfly, big even for the greatest of Carolina swallow-tails; not the dark dimorphic form, but the true Tiger Turnus itself, her barred yellow upper wings edged with black enamel indented with red gold, her tailed lower wings bordered with a wider band of black, and this not only set with lunettes of gold but with purple amethysts, and a ruby on the upper and lower edges. Her wings moved rhythmically; a constant quivering agitated her, and her antennæ with their flattened clubs seemed to be sending and receiving wireless messages from the shining world outside.

And as the wings had dried and grown firmer in the mild warm current of air and the bright sunlight, she moved them with a wider and bolder sweep. The heavy, unwieldy body, thinned by the expulsion of those currents driven upward to give flying-power to the wings, had taken on a slim and tapering grace. She had reached her fairy perfection. She was ready now for flight and light and love and freedom and the uncharted pathways of the air, ready to carry out the design of the Creator who had fashioned her so wondrously and so beautiful, and had sent ahead of her the flowers for that marvelous tongue of hers to sip.

Waiting still, opening and closing her exquisite wings, trying them, spreading them flat, the splendid swallow-

tail clung to the page of the book open at the Gospel of John. And I, idly enough, leaned forward, and saw between the opening and the closing wings, words. The which John Flint, bending forward beside me, likewise saw. *"Work,"* flashed out. And on a lower line, *"while it is day."*

I grasped the edge of the table; his knuckles showed white beside mine.

"I must work the works of him
that sent me, while it is day."

His eyes grew larger and deeper. A sort of inward light, a serene and joyous acceptance and assurance, flowed into them. I that had dared to be despondent felt a sense of awe. The Voice that had once spoken above the Mercy Seat and between the wings of the cherubim was speaking now in immortal words between the wings of a butterfly.

She was poising herself for her first flight, the bright and lovely Lady of the Sky. Now she spread her wings flat, as a fan is unfurled. And now she had lifted them clear and uncovered her message. The Butterfly Man watched her, hanging absorbed upon her every movement. And he read, softly:

"I must work
. . . while it is day."

Lightly as a flower, a living and glorious flower, she lifted and launched herself into the air, flew straight and sure for the outside light, hung poised one gracious moment, and was gone.

He turned to me the sweetest, clearest eyes I have ever

seen in a mortal countenance, the eyes of a little child. His face had caught a sort of secret beauty, that was never to leave it any more.

"Parson!" said the Butterfly Man, in a whisper that shook with the beating of his heart behind it: "Parson! *Don't it beat hell?*"

I rocked on my toes. Then I flung my arms around him, with a jubilant shout:

"It does! It does! Oh, Butterfly Man, by the grace and the glory and the wonder of God, it beats hell!"

THE END